A STUDY OF WORDSWORTH

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BY
J. C. SMITH

TO THE MEMORY OF
ERNEST DE SELINCOURT
TO WHOM ALL STUDENTS
OF WORDSWORTH ARE
DEEPLY INDEBTED

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CHAPTER I

ORGANIC SENSIBILITY

A POET, says Wordsworth, must be a man possessed of "more than usual organic sensibility." "Infant sensibility," he says again, is the "great birthright of our being"; in other men it is soon overlaid with a weight of custom, in the poet it is augmented and sustained. In the English of Wordsworth's and Jane Austen's day "sensibility" commonly connoted emotionalism, *sensibilité*, the temperament of a Marianne Dashwood. But that is not all that Wordsworth has in mind. His poet is not simply a Man of Feeling. Feeling, of course, the poet must have, since poetry is in fact the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings and arises from emotion recollected in tranquillity. But before the emotions come the senses, and it is of them that Wordsworth is thinking when he adds the epithet "organic." "Organic sensibility," then, means, or implies, in the first place the capacity to receive impressions through the senses: "animal sensibility" is De Quincey's paraphrase.

If such is indeed the ground of the poetic temperament, we may fairly begin by asking what was Wordsworth's own native endowment in this article [illegible] put about [illegible] peculiarly [illegible] ng, as he [illegible] the mind [illegible] ompound [illegible] Coleridge's remark will be discussed in a later chapter; here I purpose merely to take stock of Wordsworth's native sense-endowment.

In Wordsworth, as in most poets, the dominant sense was sight. "The most despotic of the senses,"

he calls it, and feared at one time that he might succumb to its despotism and become a mere epicure of visual sensations. Against this his nature instinctively strove by calling in the aid of his other senses, till such time as, having recovered his mental health, he was able to rally his creative and reflective powers.

Wordsworth's visual sensibility needs no detailed illustration. His poems abound in images of things clearly and penetratingly seen. Penetratingly, I say; his eye was not content to dwell on the coloured and varying surface of a scene, but sought to pierce through to what he calls its "ideal and essential truth." He knew, none better, that moving objects are the first to attract attention [1]; he had a keen eye and an apt phrase for the movements of birds—

> "the sailing glead,
> The wheeling swallow, and the darting snipe"—

and had stood hundreds of times on his lawn watching the dancing of shadows amid a press of sunshine. He had observed with fine discrimination the gradations of colour in the mosses and lichens on a mountain-side, or at the sloping margins of a lake, was enraptured with a bed of potatoes in full bloom, and found much beauty in cabbages in their various stages of growth and decay, and even (to Shelley's horror) in the iridescent scales of dead trout.[2] Still he was not Shelley's equal in descriptions of rapid movement, nor was he a painter-poet like Spenser, or Keats, or Tennyson, or Rossetti. Form and mass appealed to him more than movement, more even than colour. His senses, like his mind, craved objects that endure.

It was his discovery of these powers of observation in himself, a discovery which he made at the age of

[1] What the shepherd in *Fidelity* makes out first is "a stirring in a brake of fern."

[2] The idea that Wordsworth suffered from a peculiar form of colour-blindness because he writes so often of yellow flowers is surely a delusion. He praises a good many yellow flowers because a good many flowers are yellow.

fourteen, that first set him on to be a poet, in order that he might record the multitude of natural appearances which earlier poets had overlooked. Fresh and accurate observation of natural appearances is the chief merit of his two early poems, *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*. As this was the first of his poetic gifts to unfold, so it was the last to decay. Even in old [illegible] on the altar.

Wordsworth's eye, though clear and penetrating, was not exceptionally quick. He had not the falcon's eye that Dorothy noted and admired in Scott; *he* would not have been the first to spot the sitting hare! Before an object could make its full impression on his mind, he needed to return to it and brood over it. If the imagery of *Descriptive Sketches* is sometimes vaguer [illegible] in the hope of bearing away a more lively picture. When not thus on the march, he could prolong his observations. His gazing soul would dwell for a full half-hour upon a butterfly, or pore over the wings, sting, and laden thigh of a dim-eyed bee. When he went with Coleridge to see the bridge at Namur, Coleridge, we are told, was content to enjoy the general impression, but Wordsworth counted the arches "with the accuracy and hardness of a stone-cutter."[1] Hence that matter-of-factness which Carlyle found so satisfactory in his conversation, and Coleridge at times so distressing in his poetry.

With all this devotion to minute particulars, Wordsworth was not a mere foreground artist. His gaze dwelt even more attentively on the larger features

[1] T. C. Grattan, quoted by Harper, *Life*, ii, 346

of the background—mountains, rivers, lakes, clouds, the sky. Wordsworth was pre-eminently the poet of mountains. Coleridge could write eloquently of Mont Blanc without having seen it except through the eyes of Frederica Brun; but Wordsworth's knowledge of his native mountains came from long observation and hard climbing. His *Guide to the Lakes* reveals a born geographer's eye for country. Unaided by Ordnance Surveys he divined that the Cambrian Group consists of two dissected domes, carved into river-valleys that ray out from two centres "like the spokes of a wheel"; that the raised beach along its margin has been caused by an uplift of the land; and that alluvial deltas threaten to bisect its lakes. His eye penetrated into the solid mountains, discerning that their shapes were determined by the schist that composes them and their colour by the iron that veins it, while their arêtes were produced by the frost that drives wedge after wedge into their fissures. If he did not actually anticipate the Glacial Theory, he raised one of the questions that it was to answer when he asked how and whence came the "erratic blocks" sometimes seen on bald hill-tops and such of the boulders around tarns as have plainly not fallen from the abrupt and perilous rocks above. His description of corrie and tarn in *Fidelity* is as accurate scientifically as it is poetically impressive. He perceived, moreover, that mountains owe their grandeur not to size alone but to form, perspective, and atmosphere, the mists that veil them and the clouds that rake their summits.[1]

Some of Wordsworth's most characteristic similes are drawn from clouds:

> "I wandered lonely as a cloud."
>
> "Motionless as a cloud the old man stood."
>
> "The Knight had ridden down from Wensley moor
> With the slow motion of a summer's cloud."
>
> "Poised, like a weary cloud in middle air."

[1] This paragraph owes much to an unpublished paper by Dr Frederick Mort.

At times the clouds "set (his) thoughts a-going," and he watched them forming and dissolving with delight; in other moods, however, the sky seemed

> "no domain
> For fickle, short-lived clouds to occupy,
> Or to pass through; but rather an abyss
> *In which the everlasting stars abide.*"

"The abyss of air," "the chasm of sky," are phrases characteristic of the poet whom boundlessness attracted irresistibly.

Of all "skyey influences" none affected Wordsworth so much as sunset, sunrise, and moonlight. The most striking lines in his early *Descriptive Sketches* are those which describe a stormy sunset on the Lake of Uri; and the celestial light which once apparelled the earth to his eyes flashed on him for the last time on an evening of extraordinary splendour and beauty.

Sunrise affected him still more profoundly. There is no ecstasy in his poetry so rapturous as the Wanderer's,

> "when, from the naked top
> [illegible]

Less rapturous but not less sublime was the spectacle which the Solitary beheld, when, following the men who bore the dying pauper down the mountain-side in a dun mist, a single step freed him from the skirts of the blind vapour, and opened to his view

> "Glory beyond all glory ever seen
> By waking sense or by the dreaming soul!"

Earthly nature had wrought the effect upon the dark materials of the storm, but the appearance was of a heavenly city, a fabric of diamond and gold, with alabaster domes and silver spires, and in the midst

n object like a throne—an apocalypse of the abode f souls in bliss.

These two great visions come in *The Excursion* and are assigned to imaginary characters; but *The Prelude* records two actual experiences which should be set beside them. The first of these marked an epoch in the poet's life, and is clearly the original of the Wanderer's vision. It occurred during Wordsworth's first long vacation. He had spent a whole night in idle gaiety, dancing, and flirtation, and was returning home to Hawkshead through the fields when morning broke, "glorious," he says, "as e'er I had beheld." The sea laughed at a distance; near at hand the solid mountains shone bright as the clouds; and in the meadows at his feet was all the sweetness of a common dawn. His heart brimmed with thankful blessedness. "I made no vows," he says, "but vows were then made for me." From that hour, though as yet unconsciously, he became a dedicated spirit.

The second experience befell him some years later. He was climbing Snowdon at midnight with a friend and a guide. Mist enveloped them, and they all fell silent, wrapt each in his own musings. For an hour they panted up in silence, Wordsworth leading "with prone brow and eager pace and thought," when suddenly the ground appeared to brighten: he looked up, and lo! the full-orbed moon hung overhead naked in the cloudless azure, and at his feet stretched a silent sea of solid vapour, with mountain-tops rising through it like islands here and there—a vision which in his reflecting thought grew to be the emblem of a mind that feeds on infinity and broods over the abyss.

In three of these four visions it will be observed that there is a kind of preparation in the previous mood or condition of the beholder, so that when the vision comes it comes with a shock of contrast which carries it far into his heart.

To return to the question of "organic sensibility":

Wordsworth's ear, though perhaps less keen, and certainly much less informative, than his eye, was still very sensitive to a certain order of sounds, namely to natural sounds, especially the sounds of wood and water, in all volumes from the loudest to the faintest, from the stationary blasts of waterfalls or the roar of tempests down to the tinkling knell of a water-break or the whisper of the breeze in the harebells and the grass.

In one respect, I believe, the poet's ear was even more important to him than his eye. Sounds did not feed his imagination as sights did, but they were singularly potent to stimulate it, to induce the poetic mood. Two sounds, in particular, used to set up in him "some working of the spirit, some inward agitation" friendly to the poet's task—the rocking of leafy trees in a high wind and the beating of rain upon the roof. It is not by accident that his most characteristic *poem begins*—

> "There was a roaring in the wind all night;
> The rain came heavily and fell in floods."

It will be remembered that nothing exalted and enraptured Burns more than "to walk in the sheltered side of a wood or *high plantation*, in a *cloudy winter day*, and hear a stormy wind howling among the trees and raving o'er the plains."[1] Keats too was rapturously excited by the wind "billowing" through a tree or across a field of barley.[2] Another sound that moved Wordsworth to poetry was the sound of running water: he tells us that he composed thousands of lines by the side of the brook that runs through Easedale Again we are reminded of Burns and how he found the Muse as he wandered by himself "adown some trottin' burn's meander."

But Wordsworth's ear had one serious limitation: he had little or no sense of tune. Coleridge says;

[1] Burns's *First Common Place Book*

[2] See Colvin's *Life of John Keats*, p 80.

simply that he had no ear for music; Quillinan is more definite, and presumably more exact: "Mr W.", he says, "had no ear for instrumental music." Here he resembled Scott and differed profoundly from Milton, the poet whom in other respects he so often recalls. When Milton praises music—

> "Nor wanting power to mitigate and suage
> With solemn touches troubled thoughts, and chase
> Anguish and doubt and fear and sorrow and pain
> From mortal or immortal minds—"

we feel that he speaks from the heart. Wordsworth has praised music too, but he praises it like one who has observed rather than felt its power. If the warbling of a wren in the ruins of Furness Abbey so enchanted him that he felt he could listen to it for ever, the enchantment came more from the setting than the song. The experience recorded in *The Solitary Reaper* was not his own but his friend Wilkinson's.

The conclusion that Wordsworth was more sensitive to the volume and timbre of sounds than to varieties of pitch is confirmed by the language he uses in describing the notes or cries of birds. His descriptions of the notes of song-birds are quite conventional: wrens, larks, and linnets all "warble," redbreasts "trill," blackbirds "whistle," thrushes "pipe." But there is nothing conventional, on the contrary there is something highly individual, and (as we say) Wordsworthian, in the "faint wail" or "angry barking" of the lone eagle, the "iron knell" of the raven flying high across the sky, the "clang" of waterfowl, the "two-fold shout" of the cuckoo, the "tremulous sob" of the owl, and the "frog-like tune" of the night-hawk.

There is another element in music besides volume and pitch; there is the element of rhythm. Wordsworth's ear for rhythm, though good, was not remarkable; he added no new metres to English verse. But rhythm is not peculiar to sound, as pitch is; and in fact the form of rhythm that appealed most to

Wordsworth was not audible but visible rhythm "eye-music" as he calls it—

> "The soft eye-music of slow-waving boughs"—

eye-music which to the eyes of the Mad Mother seemed to make visible the wind that caused it :—

> "The breeze I see is in the tree."[1]

In Wordsworth's day the term "touch" covered three senses which psychology now distinguishes, namely the sense of touch properly so called, the sense of temperature, and the muscular sense or sense of pressure. There is a remarkable passage in the Eighth Book of *The Excursion* which illustrates Wordsworth's use of the term. Speaking of the effect of factory life on children, he says :—

> "And even the touch, so exquisitely poured
> Through the whole body, with a languid will
> Performs its function , rarely competent
> To impress a vivid feeling on the mind
> Of what there is delightful in the breeze,
> The gentle visitations of the sun,
> Or lapse of liquid element—by hand,
> Or foot, or lip, in summer's warmth—perceived."

Here it is clearly the sense of temperature that is uppermost in Wordsworth's mind when he speaks of touch. But another kind of touch concerns us more. The muscular sense, the sense of pressure, was f singular moment to Wordsworth at one period of is life. It was through this sense that he retained, regained, consciousness of the outside world in ose strange trances to which he was subject in his yhood. In childhood, he told Miss Fenwick, he nd it most difficult to admit the notion of death a state applicable to his own being, and this not so ch from animal vivacity as from a sense of the

Cf *Prelude*, vii, 45-6 :—

> "Tossing in sunshine its dark boughs aloft,
> As if to make the strong wind

indomitableness of the spirit within him. "With a feeling congenial to this," he continues, "I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence, and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in my own immaterial nature. Many times when going to school have I grasped at a wall or a tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality." He described the same experience to Bonamy Price in terms somewhat more explicit. Grasping a five-barred gate he said, "There was a time in my life when I was often forced to grasp, like this, something that resisted, to be sure that there was anything outside of me. This gate, this bar, this road, these trees fell away from me and vanished into thought. I was sure of the existence of my mind—I had no sense of the existence of matter."

This account of his trances helps to explain a difficult passage in the original (1805) version of *The Prelude*. Wordsworth tells how he walked from Bristol to Racedown on a calm, mild day of autumn. In the afternoon he lay down at the foot of a tree:—

"Thus long I lay
Chear'd by the genial pillow of the earth
Beneath my head, sooth'd by a sense of touch
From the warm ground, that balanced me, else lost
Entirely, seeing nought, nought hearing, save
When here and there, about the grove of Oaks
Where was my bed, an acorn from the trees
Fell audibly, and with a startling sound."

What is meant by the words "that balanced me"? In the light of what he told Miss Fenwick I take them to mean that, with sight and hearing in abeyance, only the sense of touch, the contact of the warm earth with his body, saved him from falling into an "abyss of idealism." In this case the sense of temperature combined with that of pressure to keep him aware of the world outside of him.

Apart from sight and touch and (with an important qualification) hearing, Wordsworth's endowment in the special senses was meagre. His sense of smell, like

Scott's, was very obtuse. Southey says bluntly that he had no sense of smell. The assertion is perhaps too absolute. Wordsworth was aware, at least in theory, of the pleasures of smell, and even of its power of recall. In his famous letter to John Wilson he remarks that no human being can be so besotted and debased as to be utterly insensible to the colours, forms, or smell of flowers. In *The White Doe of Rylstone* (ll. 1025 ff.) he speaks of the fragrance of the woodbine reviving the memory of hours when

> "from the pendent woodbine came
> Like odours, sweet as if the same."

Here, however, an odour merely recalls a similar odour sensed on other occasions. Wordsworth comes nearer to recognizing the general evocative power of odours in the poem called *Presentiments*, where among the instruments of presentiment he names "A subtle smell that spring unbinds." But against these rather vague allusions we must set Southey's positive assertion. And Southey's assertion does not stand alone. We have James Payn's word for it that Wordsworth could not distinguish the scent of a bean-field in bloom, surely the most distinctive, as it is one of the most delicious, of country odours. "The bean-flower's boon" meant nothing to him. For olfactory purposes that haughty nose of his was a barren promontory. This was a sad privation for a poet. For the sense of smell, though it brings little information to civilized man, has still a singular power to evoke, or revive, large diffused emotional moods, often highly favourable to poetic creation. When Lear calls for an ounce of civet to sweeten his imagination, he utters a cry of nature. Schiller kept a store of rotten apples in his desk to stimulate, if not to sweeten, his imagination. But neither rotting apples nor bean-flowers would have availed with Wordsworth.

The fact that both Scott and Wordsworth were deficient at once in the sense of pitch and the sense

of smell makes us suspect some organic connection between these two senses. The suspicion grows when we observe that poets richly endowed in both tend sometimes to describe the one in terms of the other. The Duke in *Twelfth Night* exclaims :—

> "That strain again! It had a dying fall :
> O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet south
> That breathes upon a bank of violets,
> Stealing and giving odour!"

The song of the Lady in *Comus* rises "like a stream of rich distilled perfumes." And so, but more subtly, Shelley :—

> "And the hyacinth purple, and white and blue,
> Which flung from its bells a sweet peal anew
> Of music so delicate, soft, and intense,
> It was felt like an odour within the sense."

Such a simile would never have occurred to Wordsworth. But on one occasion he used a simile equally remarkable, and as significant for him as Shelley's is for Shelley. Our authority is Southey. "Wordsworth," he writes, "had no sense of smell. Once, and only once in his life, the dormant power was awakened ; it was by a bed of stocks in full bloom, at a house which he inhabited in Dorsetshire, some five and twenty years ago, and he says it was like a vision of Paradise to him ; but it lasted only a few minutes, and the faculty has continued torpid from that time." Shelley might have compared that odour to the bells of Heaven ; to Wordsworth "it was like a vision of Paradise" ; so dominant in him was the sense of sight.

It seems, then, that Wordsworth's ear for music was poor, and his sense of smell obtuse. His sense of temperature was not obtuse, as the lines I have quoted from *The Excursion* show ; but neither was it exquisite, like Keats's. It did little to feed his imagination. He could not have written the first stanza of *The Eve of St Agnes*, still less such a blood-freezing line as

> "To think how they must ache in icy hoods and mails."

Nor was he at all richly endowed in the sense of taste, *which brought such a wealth of imagery to Keats.* He could no more have written the second stanza of the *Ode to a Nightingale* than the first stanza of *The Eve of St Agnes.* No: "harmonious," "luscious," "fragrant"—these are no epithets for Wordsworth's world. It is an austere world; it is almost bleak—bare trees and mountains bare.

But his deficiency in these special senses was more than outweighed by a gift denied to Keats, a sense of the sublime, a capacity for impressions which I will *call super-sensuous, leaving it an open question whether* this capacity was simply an extraordinary heightening (hyperæsthesia) of the senses of sight and hearing—the senses in which he was most richly endowed—or some mode of perception transcending sense. Wordsworth himself inclined to the latter interpretation. He believed that this ordinary, sensible world, the world of eye and ear, was surrounded or interpenetrated by unknown modes of being:

> "*Oh! there is life that breathes not; Powers there are*
> That touch each other to the quick in modes
> Which the gross world no sense hath to perceive,
> No soul to dream of."

And he believed that he himself possessed a sense to perceive such powers, a sense akin to, or part of, that "visionary power" which was his peculiar and most precious gift. Silence is a condition highly favourable to vision, and Wordsworth possessed beyond all other poets the ear for silence; silence that is something deeper far than quiet or ease; "the silence that is in the starry sky"; nay, for a silence beyond silence—"silent hills and more than silent sky." Was it with the ear of flesh that the poet heard "the ghostly language of the ancient earth"? Or caught beyond the uproar of the skating throng "an alien sound of melancholy," sent into the tumult from far distant hills?

At times the ancient earth presented a new face to his eyes. In the perilous sport of bird-nesting, when he hung on the face of a crag, suspended there, as it seemed, by nothing but the pressure of the blast, he viewed the world, as it were, from another plane, and then the sky

> "seemed not a sky
> Of earth, and with what motion moved the clouds!"

Moreover, he possessed—or so it seems to me—a remarkable sense of space; not of distance only—there Milton far surpasses him—but of space in three dimensions, of solidity: "the solid mountains," "the solid frame of earth," "the round ocean," "ocean's liquid mass," "the convex of the watery globe." One might almost venture to say that Wordsworth not only knew but felt that the earth was round. Certainly he deliberately courted, and perhaps at times achieved, a sensation the most massive of which human sense is capable, the sensation so impressively described in the opening pages of *The Return of the Native*, the sensation of the diurnal rotation of the earth. Skating on Esthwaite Lake, he tells us:—

> "When we had given our bodies to the wind,
> And all the shadowy banks on either side
> Came sweeping through the darkness, spinning still
> The rapid line of motion, then at once
> Have I, reclining back upon my heels,
> Stopped short; yet still the solitary cliffs
> Wheeled by me—even as if the earth had rolled
> With visible motion her diurnal round."

Such was the experience that was later to inspire the stark sublimity of

> "No motion has she now, no force;
> She neither hears nor sees,
> Rolled round in earth's diurnal course
> With rocks and stones and trees."

CHAPTER II

MEMORY

THESE sense-impressions, visual and other but chiefly visual, were stored by Wordsworth in a memory which in his youth was "wax to receive and marble to retain." It was in 1803 that he saw the Highland girl at Inversnaid and wrote of her beautiful abode:

> "In spots like these it is we prize
> Our Memory, feel that she hath eyes."

In 1843 he told Miss Fenwick: "And now approaching my seventy-third year, I have a most vivid remembrance of her, and the beautiful objects with which she was surrounded." Of Simon Lee he said: "I have, after an interval of forty-five years, the image of the old man as fresh before my eyes as if I had seen him yesterday." Of a couplet in *An Evening Walk*—

> "And, fronting the bright west, yon oak entwines
> His darkening boughs and leaves in stronger lines"—

he said: "I recollect distinctly the very spot where this first struck me. It was in the way between Hawkshead and Ambleside, and gave me extreme pleasure." He was fourteen when that sight first struck him; after fifty-nine years he "recollected distinctly the very spot" And not the spot only, but the extreme pleasure which the sight gave him. He had as strong a memory for [illegible] could never forget, he s[illegible] his heart when he wa[illegible] *Upon the Sight of a Beautiful Picture*, and remembered well the mysterious awe with which he used to listen to anything said about storms and shipwrecks. Most of these memories, it will be observed, were pleasurable. Wordsworth was constitutionally a happy man, remembering pleasant things better than painful, so that his

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memory was a constant source of happiness to him, "the bliss of solitude,"[1] filled with "genuine images" to heighten joy and cheer him in sorrow.

This precious gift he cultivated assiduously, dwelling in memory on the scenes over which he had pored in actual observation, and comparing them with the formative experiences of earlier days, till, like his own Wanderer, he achieved a power to fasten images upon his brain, on whose outlines he brooded till they acquired the liveliness of dreams.

The most potent of all his earlier memories were those visionary experiences which he calls "spots of time." As he roamed by Penrith Beacon with Mary Hutchinson "in youth's golden gleam," his joy was heightened by recollection of the visionary dreariness which had invested that scene when first he saw it, a terrified child fleeing from the hollow where a gibbet had stood. But what enhanced his present joy was not the contrasted dreariness of the remembered scene but its visionary quality, and the strength which he drew from an experience in which mind triumphed over sense. Of memories still deeper I shall speak when I come to deal with the *Immortality* Ode.

Wordsworth's tenacious memory has a bearing on his theory and practice of poetry. It is related of Tennyson that, having read an account of the charge of the Light Brigade in which occurred the words, "Some one had blundered," he sat down at once, and, with the rhythm of these words in his head, wrote the poem in a few minutes. That was not Wordsworth's way. His works do indeed contain ten poems which he describes as extempore. Of these the longest and best is the *Effusion on the Death of James Hogg*: the others amount to only 151 lines in all. With these exceptions—and I doubt if even these were all what he calls one of

[1] Cf. *Bothwell Castle*:—

> "Memory, like sleep, hath powers which dreams obey,
> Dreams, vivid dreams, that are not fugitive;
> How little that she cherishes is lost!"

them "extempore to the letter"—it is true to say that Wordsworth was not given to poetizing an experience immediately, not used, as he puts it, to make a present joy the matter of a song. Once indeed he did attempt to poetize a present sorrow. When his brother John was drowned, he tells us: "I began to give vent to my feelings in a poem; but I was overpowered by my subject, and could not proceed. I composed much, but it is all lost except a few lines, as it came from me in such a torrent that I was unable to remember it." His characteristic mode of composition was quite different. He blames Scott for going out with pencil and note-book, taking an inventory of Nature's charms, and weaving them into descriptions. He should have left his note-book at home, says Wordsworth, and taken all that he saw into a heart that could understand and *enjoy*; *then, after several days, interrogated* his memory. He would have found that much that was accidental had vanished; what remained would have been the ideal and essential truth of the scene. It is obvious that in this censure of Scott's methods Wordsworth is describing his own, and that in defining poetry as arising from emotion recollected in tranquillity he is simply generalizing from his own practice. He would let an impression sink into his mind and "interrogate his memory" after an interval.

But much would depend on the length of the interval. A new impression would *remain for a time in* his conscious memory, holding its place in the recurring pattern of his thoughts. Presently, however, it would sink into what Henry James has called "the deep well of the unconscious"; and there it might lie completely forgotten, if anything is ever completely forgotten; or, after a lapse of months, or even years,[1] at the call of

[1] Cf. *The Waggoner*, Part IV :—

"Nor is it I who play the part,
But a shy spirit in my heart,
That comes and goes—will sometimes leap
From hiding-places ten years deep."

some association, it might rise to the surface again, having undergone a change. Such mental alchemy is, in fact, a mark of the poetic temperament. There would be little of it in a mind like Macaulay's, where almost every impression, once registered, seems to have remained in the conscious memory, pigeon-holed for reference. But poets are distinguished from other men not more by their greater "organic sensibility" than by the greater richness and associative power of their subconscious memories. The nature of the change that a submerged experience undergoes depends, of course, on the other contents of the subconscious mind. In a mind like Coleridge's, fed largely on books, ideas attracted each other chiefly by force of literary association, as Professor Livingston Lowes has shown in *The Road to Xanadu*. But Wordsworth, though a well-read man, was no bookworm. His mind was stored with actual experiences, memories of what he had seen and felt, the most potent in attractive force being those "spots of time" to which I have referred.

Now poetry may arise from either of these levels, either (that is) from the conscious or from the unconscious memory. I will give an unambiguous example of each kind:

Wordsworth heard the story of Alice Fell on 16th February 1802; he wrote the poem on 12th and 13th March of the same year, that is less than a month later, when it still kept its place in his conscious memory. Except that he uses the first person, and gives money "to the host" instead of "to some respectable people in the town," he tells the tale as 'twas told to him. The incident is movingly reported, but it is not transmuted; it lacks the visionary touch, or has it only in the single line—

"Sitting behind the chaise alone."

Contrast the conception and slow gestation of *Resolution and Independence*. The poet is alone on the moor, rejoicing in the calm, bright sunrise after a

night tempestuous with wind and rain. From this high mood he has sunk into deep dejection as he thinks of other poets who had begun in gladness and ended miserably, when on the lonely moor before him he sees unawares another solitary figure, an old, bent man stirring a pool with his staff. As he listens to the leech-gatherer's tale of hardship borne with fortitude, he falls into trance after trance, to wake renewed in faith and firmness of mind. Such is the substance of the poem. And here is Dorothy's account of the original incident :—

"When William and I returned from accompanying Jones, we met an old man almost double. He had on a coat, thrown over his shoulders, above his waistcoat and coat. Under his arm he carried a bundle and had an apron on and a nightcap. His face was interesting. He had dark eyes and a long nose. John, who afterwards met him at Wytheburn, took him for a Jew. He was of Scotch parents, but had been born in the army. He had had a wife, and 'she was a good woman, and it pleased God to bless them with ten children.' All these were dead but one, of whom he had not heard for many years, a sailor. His trade was to gather leeches, but now leeches were scarce, and he had not strength for it. He lived by begging, and was making his way to Carlisle, where he should buy a few godly books to sell. He said leeches were very scarce, partly owing to the dry season, but many years they had been scarce. He supposed it was owing to their being much sought after, that they did *not* breed fast, and were of slow growth. Leeches were formerly 2s. 6d. per 100; they are now 30s. He had been hurt in driving a cart, his body driven over, his skull fractured. He felt no pain till he recovered from his first insensibility. It was then late in the evening, when the light was just going away."

It will be seen that, while many details have vanished, Wordsworth has preserved the "ideal and essential truth" of the old man's appearance—his great age, his dark eyes, his frame bent double from "some

dire constraint of pain" in time past, even the Scottish tone of his speech. But the setting has been quite transformed. Actually, Wordsworth was not alone when they met—Dorothy was with him; they did not meet on the moor but on the Grasmere road; not at sunrise but late in the evening; and the old man was not gathering leeches but begging his way to Carlisle. Three things must be added which do not appear from mere comparison of the poem with Dorothy's *Journal*:—(1) The meeting took place on 26th September 1800; the poem was not begun till 3rd May 1802. (2) The poem, begun on 3rd May, was not finished till 4th July,[1] *i.e.* it took two months to write, while *Alice Fell* took only two days. (3) There is no reason to suppose that Wordsworth was dejected in September 1800; but in May 1802 he was dejected, partly for personal reasons, partly from anxiety about Coleridge, who was sinking deeper into the opium habit, and whose Ode on *Dejection* had been written a month earlier, when Wordsworth, to whom it was originally addressed, was with him at Keswick. (The Ode on *Dejection* was in fact Coleridge's reply to the first four stanzas of the *Immortality* Ode, which Wordsworth had brought with him to Keswick.) When Wordsworth came home, infected with Coleridge's dejection, his mind reverted by contrast (shall we say?) to the figure of the old leech-gatherer, as a symbol of firmness in adversity. But he could not poetize that figure till he had placed it in such a setting as evoked his visionary power. Hence the sunrise, the roar of woods and distant waters, the moorland solitude, the solitary figure of the old man alone with him alone; hence too the preparation for vision in the poet's mood of dejection supervening on exaltation. The result is a poem quintessentially Wordsworthian, not least in its moral core, that strength of soul which is our last place of refuge.

[1] The first draft was written in a single burst of inspiration which lasted five days; but it was worked over, and did not take its final shape till 4th July.

CHAPTER III

PLEASURE, FEAR, LOVE

. PLEASURE.—When Wordsworth saw the silhouette of that oak against the sunset "in the way from Hawkshead to Ambleside," it gave him extreme pleasure. Here then is another essential element in the growth of a poet's mind. With his gifts of observation Wordsworth might have made a name in Natural Science; indeed geologists have deplored the loss to their science of the observer who first called attention to the "perched" boulders that are sometimes seen to lie "couched on the bald top of an eminence." But science seeks only to advance knowledge; poetry aims at communicating pleasure. There is no article in his creed on which Wordsworth insists more firmly than this, that the poet's business is to give pleasure. Even when his subject is painful in itself, he must so treat it that the result will yield an overplus of pleasure. To communicate pleasure a poet must feel it, and feel it more intensely than other men; he must be possessed of a "more than usual" capacity not only for sense-impressions but for pleasure. Defending Burns, Wordsworth roundly maintains that the poet has a licence to sympathize with and to celebrate even the pleasures of love and wine and the joy of battle. H did not avail himself of that licence Praise of woman wine, and war was not his trade. He wrote no lov songs, no bottle-songs, and of battle-songs only enou to show what he could do in that line if he chos Nor would he stoop to excite his readers with Got tales of mystery and horror, such as were then in vog Wordsworth's so-called "Return to Nature" me among other things, that he turned his back on

1 *Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle.*

supernatural and the sensational, "to pipe a simple song for thinking hearts." He would add to the sum of human happiness, to "joy in widest commonalty spread," by enlarging the sphere of human sensibility, educating men's perceptions and feelings till they ceased to crave for vulgar stimulants and found continual pleasure in the common things that lay round them in Nature and in human life.

Wordsworth's conception of pleasure was more than a piece of æsthetic theory. What it meant for him is revealed, almost casually, in the phrase "vital feelings of delight." That is its real significance: pleasure is vital; it is a sign of life, like the bloom on the cheek of youth, as Aristotle put it. But Wordsworth went beyond Aristotle. For him pleasure has an absolute or mystical value, as a sign that our individual lives are rooted in a whole whose life is joy, are living branches of the tree of life, with its sap tingling in our veins. And not ours only: pleasure is not confined to men nor to what we commonly call sentient beings. Wherever there is life there is pleasure. The daffodils dance for glee; the budding twigs take pleasure in the breezy air. These are not mere flights of fancy. When Wordsworth says

> "And 'tis my faith that every flower
> Enjoys the air it breathes,"

he utters his deep conviction that the heart of the world beats in happiness.

For the poet as poet pleasure has yet a further significance. Sense-impressions being the material of his art, it is along the pulse of feeling that these are carried into the poet's heart, and rooted there, to bloom perhaps into imagery in due season. A pure intelligence could not be a poet. A poet's thoughts are steeped in feeling.

II. Fear.—The feelings in which the poet's thoughts are steeped must be predominantly pleasurable if they are to warm his mind to the point of poetic creation.

Yet in his account of the growth of his own mind and of the *mind* of the Wanderer, who is his other self, Wordsworth gives, if not the foremost, certainly the second place to an emotion which at first sight seems to be incompatible with pleasure in any form—the emotion of fear. There is nothing more remarkable in Wordsworth's psychology than his insistence on the formative value of fear. He pours contempt on the model child of the Rousseauites, who is superior alike to natural and supernatural fear, "unless"—and the exception is significant—"unless it *leap upon him in* a dream." For himself he confesses that he was attracted, almost to excess, by that beauty, which, as Milton sings,

> "Hath terror in it."

The scenes of his boyhood were fastened on his affections not only by "pleasure and repeated happiness," but by "the impressive discipline of fear." The *foundations of the Wanderer's mind were laid*

> "In such communion, not from terror free."

Fear sat in his heart, "a cherished visitant," before he had learned the lesson of love. Finally, and conclusively, he says of his own childhood :—

> "Fair seedtime had my soul, and I grew up
> Fostered alike by beauty and by fear."

Once, when caught in a storm at sea, Wordsworth thought with a touch of envy that Byron and Shelley would probably have rejoiced in a situation from which he was not a little glad to escape; but he consoled himself with the reflection that every *man* has his fears of some kind or other, and no doubt *they* had theirs. What kind of fear was it that "fostered" Wordsworth's soul?

In the first place, it was not horror, *not* that shudder of the mortal flesh under which the soul sickens. From that he was immune; and he gives a strange

tance of his immunity and a stranger reason for it. on after he went to school at Hawkshead a bather s drowned in the lake. The water was dragged, and last the dead man rose to the surface, "bolt upright, ith his ghastly face." The child—he was only eight ears old—saw that spectral shape of terror, yet no soul-debasing fear possessed him; for, poring on fairy tales and romances, he had already beheld such scenes in fancy, but beheld them in ideal settings that purged them of their horror.

Still, though immune from fleshly horror, and freer than most men from the vulgar dread of death or danger —he was a daring cragsman at school—Wordsworth appears to have been subject at times to accesses of panic. The instances which he gives himself are taken from his boyhood; but there is an incident of his manhood, related by Dorothy, which seems to be not without significance in this connection. It happened soon after they came to Grasmere. Bad news had come from Coleridge, and Wordsworth went out alone to walk in John's Grove. Later in the evening Dorothy went to look for him. She found him in a strange state. "He had been surprised and terrified," she says, "by a sudden rushing of winds, which seemed to bring earth, sky, and lake together, as if the whole were going to enclose him." "He had been surprised and terrified;" and though his terror was plainly a matter less of the nerves than of an imagination already wrought upon by fears for Coleridge, it is also plai that its origin was not wholly imaginary.

The characteristic form which this emotion of fe took in his boyhood was somewhat different a differently excited, less akin to natural than to sup natural fear, as we may gather from two instan related in *The Prelude* :—

One of the favourite sports among the boy Hawkshead was the snaring of woodcocks, whic winter settled on the hilltops round the village as the quails in the desert of Sinai. On moo

nights Wordsworth used to climb the hills alone, to secure the birds that had been caught in his snares. Sometimes he yielded to temptation, and took birds from other boys' snares. "And when the deed was done," he says,

> [illegible]

Another time he stole a boat and rowed out into the lake.[1] Undeterred by the mountain echoes, he fixed his eyes on a ridge which formed the horizon, and drove the boat along. Suddenly from behind the horizon-ridge a new peak rose, black and huge, towering up between him and the stars, menacing him, striding after him. His heart failed him, and he stole back to the shore. But for many days after his brain worked with a dim sense of unknown modes of being; a darkness hung on his thoughts, blotting out all familiar shapes; and huge and mighty forms, that do not live like living men, moved slowly through his mind by day, and were a trouble to his dreams.

The first of these incidents belonged to his tenth year, and so apparently did the second. On both occasions, it will be observed, the boy was alone in the night; and (what is still more important) the impression of fear fell on a mind made sensitive by conscious guilt. Trivial as they seem to us, both acts were acts of stealth, affronting righteous Nature in her sanctuary. Such were the experiences that Wordsworth had in mind when, in the *Immortality* Ode, he gave thanks and praise for those

> [illegible]

Akin to this experience, but not the same, is that

[1] The lake, as we now know, was Ullswater, not Esthwaite.

which he has recorded in *Nutting*. There, however, Nature, though reproachful, is not menacing, and the emotion aroused is not fear but remorse.

Realization of the part that fear had played in the growth of his own mind came to Wordsworth with the force of a new discovery. The fashionable philosophy of that age regarded fear as a slavish emotion, fostered, if not actually engendered, by kings and priests to keep men in subjection, the hangman's whip to hold wretches in order. Enlightened thinkers like Godwin saw nothing in fear but the vulgar dread of death and punishment, here or hereafter. It did not enter into their minds to conceive that fear may be an ingredient in such lofty sentiments as wonder, awe, worship, even love. Wordsworth was the first in that age to recognize that fear, though in excess it may paralyze the mind, can also sensitize it, and agitate us with thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls. The truth thus rediscovered by Wordsworth was not in fact unknown to earlier ages. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge," says the Book of Proverbs. "It is good," say the Eumenides in Æschylus, "that fear should sit as the guardian of the soul, forcing it into wisdom." And Shakespeare makes the wise Lafeu declare: "We make trifles of terrors, ensconcing ourselves into seeming knowledge when we should submit ourselves to an unknown fear."

When we speak of Wordsworth's "optimism" we must never forget this underlying sense of the unknown and awful power on which our dark foundations rest,[1] the darkness with which our haughty life is crowned,[2] the dread foundations of the towers of Love itself.[3]

III. LOVE.—This was not the only discovery that Wordsworth made when he threw off his allegiance to Godwin. In the cold fit that followed his return from

[1] *Excursion*, iv, 970.
[2] *Effusion on the Death of James Hogg*, l. 29.
[3] *Miscellaneous Sonnets*, iii, 44, 10.

France he had cast about him for intellectual support to his Revolutionary faith, and found it for a time in Godwin's *Political Justice*. Godwin was a thoroughgoing sensationalist: he held that at birth the mind is a *tabula rasa*, capable only of receiving sense-impressions, which leave on it those traces that he calls ideas. Out of these Reason somehow emerges and proclaims the pursuit of the general good as the one rule of conduct. Emotions like gratitude and filial love are childish; tradition and convention are superstitions. The Godwinian sage will be guided solely by a calculation of the consequences of his actions, and will choose at every juncture the course which his independent intellect, unbiassed by instinct, emotion, tradition or convention, concludes to be best calculated to promote the general good. A concrete, feeling mind like Wordsworth's could not long rest content with this frigid moral arithmetic, and in *The Borderers* we see him sloughing it off. The hero of that tragedy is a would-be Godwinian, who on a rational "calculation of consequences" leaves a blind old man to perish on the moor, and is then overwhelmed with unavailing remorse. Godwinism was bankrupt for the author of *The Borderers*. By that time, happily, he had passed the dead centre where he "abandoned moral questions in despair." As he renewed his youth in the sunshine of Dorothy's society and Coleridge's friendship, he began to meditate a great philosophical poem, and in preparation for it to review the growth of his own mind and explore the penetralia of human nature in the light of self-knowledge. Experience taught him [illegible]

power" not in his abstract reason but at the opposite pole from it, in his primal instincts and affections, looking for them not among Godwinian calculators of consequences, but among humble men, among women

and children and crazy or half-witted persons, where these primal instincts and affections

> "Exist more simple in their elements,
> And speak a plainer language."

The powers of which Wordsworth was in search as deeper and more authoritative than reason were eminently those which erect man above himself, and reach out towards that infinitude which is his true destiny—hope, effort, expectation, desire, and above all love. It is their infinite capacity for love that exalts poor women like Betty Foy, or Margaret of *The Ruined Cottage*, or that other Margaret who waits day and night for her lost son,

> "With love and longings infinite."

The capacity for infinite love is brought out above all by suffering, which in itself "shares the nature of Infinity." Extreme suffering may drive a mother mad, but it cannot quench maternal love. Suffering that breaks down the pales and forts of reason in the Mad Mother, and Ruth, and Martha Ray, filled Wordsworth not only with pity but with awe. Even in idiots, crazed by nature not by suffering, even in such "naturals" he found something sacred, that often made him apply to them in his own mind the sublime expression of Scripture, "Their life is hidden with God."

In children he saw man's patent of divinity in intimations of immortality such as his own childhood had known. The true meaning of *We Are Seven* is obscured by the opening stanza. That stanza was in fact thrown off by Coleridge. Wordsworth accepted it laughingly; but in speaking of it long afterwards to Miss Fenwick, he said that his own childish belief that he could never die came not so much from the source of animal vivacity as from a sense of the indomitableness of the spirit within him. Moreover, in his essay *Upon Epitaphs*, Wordsworth avows his conviction that we could not continue to love beings

whom we know to be mortal unless this sense of immortality were anterior to any experience of death. For these reasons I believe, in spite of Coleridge, that the little girl in *We Are Seven* refuses to admit the notion of death, not because she feels her life in every limb, but because of that sense of oneness with the Unseen which is the theme of the *Immortality* Ode.

Finally, but at a date somewhat later than that of the first *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth came to recognize kindred powers of instinct and affection in the lower animals. He had long been a pleased observer of the play of animals, and watched the sportive fawn, or the blythe mountain roe, or the hare running races in her mirth, or the kitten at play with the falling leaves, all teaching him, as I have said, that wherever there is life there is joy. But now he came to look on his dumb fellow-creatures with a deeper feeling, and to see in the sublime devotion of the spaniel in *Fidelity*, and the intense, tender sympathy of the little dog Music,

> "A soul of love, love's intellectual law."

Love, he perceived, is not peculiar to man, but comes wherever life and sense are given by God. And thus human anguish may be tempered by sympathies

> "Aloft ascending, and descending deep,
> Even to the inferior kinds."[1]

Love, then, is one of the hiding-places of man's power. Yet Wordsworth was not a love-poet in the ordinary sense. He deliberately denied himself the theme which in all ages has been the chief inspiration of lyric poetry. He once said that if he had written poems of passion, they might have been more ardent than his principles allowed; and the claim, which caused an earlier generation of readers to smile, seems less extravagant now that we know of his own passion for Annette Vallon and can read the great love-passage in *Vaudracour and Julia* in the light of it The fact

[1] *The White Doe of Rylstone*, Dedication, ll. 43, 44

remains that he wrote no poems of passion. Yet he has left us five poems, the famous "Lucy" poems, which, though not passionate, breathe an affection so deep and tender that we can only call it love. Four of them were written in Germany in the winter of 1798-1799, and the fifth soon after his return to England. We do not know who Lucy was, nor indeed if there ever was a Lucy. Coleridge believed that she was Dorothy, and it is a fact that in the poem beginning "Among all lovely things my love hath been"—a poem which he never reprinted—"Lucy" does stand for Dorothy. But it is also a fact that in the original version of the poem the name was "Emma"! Apart from this I find Coleridge's idea incredible: Dorothy did not die young, nor did Nature "rear her form to stately height." Other clues break in our hands in the same way. Lucy dwelt "beside the springs of Dove," and there is a Dove in the Peak District which Wordsworth visited one long vacation; but there is also a Dove in Patterdale, not out of reach from Hawkshead; and a Dovey in North Wales, which Wordsworth might have visited when he stayed with his friend Jones. Two lines in the first draft of the poem—

"And she was graceful as the broom
That flowers by Carron's side"—

seem to promise a clue, till we find that Wordsworth took the broom from Langhorne.[1] I conclude, though without much conviction, that Lucy is an ideal figure, an ideal of English maidenhood, born of the poet's longing for England during that "melancholy dream" of exile in Germany, and touched with memories of Mary Hutchinson, who had been his first love,[2] and to whom his heart was now returning.

The love that inspired Wordsworth's poetry was not

[1] I owe this information to Professor E. de Selincourt.

[2] In a variant on *Prelude*, xi, 261-3, he wrote of her as

"the maid
To whom were breathed my first fond vows."

sexual love; it was the love of Nature and Man, of country and freedom, family and friends. His love of Nature had three phases: in boyhood she was endeared to him merely as the scene of his boyish sports; in youth he came to love her for herself, love her with passion, but as yet with no conscious sense of her Divinity. That came with manhood, and will be dealt with more appropriately in the chapter on Wordsworth's religion. So too I reserve to the chapter on his politics any discussion of the love of country and freedom that inspired his great political sonnets and his *Tract on the Convention of Cintra.* As for love of Man, the disciple of Beaupuy could say truly enough in 1792 that his heart was all given to the people and his love was theirs. Indeed he never lost his love for the people, though at times he lost his faith in them. But love of the people *en masse* was too abstract and, as Aristotle would put it, too watery a sentiment to inspire his poetry. Moreover, he was a countryman, unfamiliar with the aspirations and emotions of crowds. He was not destined to chant

> "the fierce confederate storm
> Of sorrow, barricaded evermore
> Within the walls of cities";

but rather

> "To hear humanity in woods and groves
> Pipe solitary anguish."

It was not of Man but of men that he sang. And the keynote of his song was family love.

In Wordsworth family love was a passion. He had "a violence of affection," Dorothy tells us, which showed itself in a thousand attentions—

> "little, nameless, unremembered, acts
> Of kindness and of love"—

and in a tenderness that never slept. Such affection was indeed a passion, even a tragic passion. The death of his brother John in 1805 changed the whole current of his thoughts; the death of his boy Thomas aged him by ten years; the death of Dora broke his heart.

These emotions very seldom found utterance in verse. When John died he attempted, as has been related, to give vent to his feelings in a poem, but the subject overpowered him. Only the death of his little Catherine inspired (but how long after we know not) the most poignant sonnet in English literature :—

> " Surprised by joy—impatient as the Wind
> I turned to share the transport—Oh ! with whom
> But Thee, deep buried in the silent tomb,
> That spot which no vicissitude can find ?
> Love, faithful love, recalled thee to my mind—
> But how could I forget thee ? Through what power,
> Even for the least division of an hour,
> Have I been so beguiled as to be blind
> To my most grievous loss !—That thought's return
> Was the worst pang that sorrow ever bore,
> Save one, one only, when I stood forlorn,
> Knowing my heart's best treasure was no more ;
> That neither present time, nor years unborn
> Could to my sight that heavenly face restore."

As an expression of personal grief, this sonnet stands alone in his works. But the very strength of feeling which choked the utterance of personal grief enabled him to enter into and to express with unequalled power the love of brother for brother, of father for son, and of mother for child, in *The Brothers*, and *Michael*, and *The Affliction of Margaret*. He loved his friends too, loved them deeply, if not with the violence of affection that he felt for his own family. The best of his later poems were written when he was moved by the suffering or death of old friends. There are lines, indeed there are whole stanzas, in his *Effusion on the Death of James Hogg* that sound like echoes from his prime. And again it may be noted that the death of Coleridge, which inspired the noblest and most heartfelt of these lines, had taken place sixteen months before, while the immediate occasion of the poem was the death of one who had been little more than an old acquaintance.

CHAPTER IV

DREAM, HALLUCINATION, REVERIE, VISION

Much of what I have said in Chapter I about Wordsworth's "organic sensibility" might have been said with almost equal truth about his sister Dorothy. Her eye for Nature and her delight in Nature were as keen as her brother's, at least when she was by his side. Yet Dorothy, though she sometimes attempted verse, was not a poet, because with all her sensibility she lacked creative power. It was not mere sensibility that Wordsworth claimed for himself as poet; he claimed to possess "creative sensibility," "a forming hand," "a plastic power," an eye that lent its objects "an auxiliar light." Here we touch the real nerve of poetry. Those other gifts of sense and emotion only provide its materials and occasions; this is its active principle. The poet creates.

How and in what sense does the poet create? To answer that question fully we should have to follow an experience when it sank into the poet's mind and watch its transmutation there. Unfortunately, at this, the hardest and most obscure point of our enquiry, Wordsworth's direct guidance is of little avail. "I feel that I am trifling," he says when he tries to describe the trance into which he fell when first he entered London; and he might have said the same of his faltering attempts to communicate the incommunicable secret of poetic creation. At this point, therefore, I propose to abandon the direct line of approach which I have followed up to now, and make a détour, in the hope of catching a glimpse of the creative process, as it were by a side-glance. This détour takes us through the country inhabited by Wordsworth's dreams, hallucinations, reveries, and visions.

I. Dreams.—We do not commonly think of Wordsworth as a dreamer. Coleridge, yes; but surely not that "cold, hard, silent, practical man," whom Carlyle portrayed with his "immense head and great jaws like a crocodile's."[1] I fear that Carlyle's amazing gift of words sometimes did duty for observation and insight. If the use of *clichés* had not dulled our feeling for words, we could not fail to be struck by the frequency and strangeness of Wordsworth's references to dreams. Here are some instances: the list might easily be extended:—

The sweet Highland girl and her lovely abode

> "together seem
> Like something fashioned in a dream."

Listening to the street-fiddler are

> "twenty souls happy as souls in a dream."

The high beatitude of youth enjoys

> "waking thoughts more bright than happiest dreams."
>
> "The liveliness of dreams."
>
> "Almost as vivid as a dream."
>
> "The varnish and the gloss of dreams."
>
> "The glory and the freshness of a dream."
>
> "But as for the great lodge, you might as well
> Hunt half a day for a forgotten dream."

These are truly surprising similes. If we are honest with ourselves—I speak for those who are not poets—we shall own that our dreams, as a rule, are not lovely, nor happy, nor lively, vivid, bright, glorious, fresh. On the contrary they are commonly vague in feeling-tone, blurred in outline, dull in colour, inconsequent, and above all fugitive. But to Wordsworth apparently the world of dreams—"Dreams, books, are each a world"—was something more beautiful, beatific, and vivid than waking reality. Not to admit this means

[1] See Gavan Duffy's *Conversations with Carlyle*, p. 55.

simply that we have failed to recognize Wordsworth's stubborn fidelity to experience in his use of words. But we are not confined for evidence to similes from his poems. *The Prelude* and *The Excursion* put the matter beyond doubt. The Wanderer of *The Excursion* was reared

> "In dreams, in study, and in ardent thought."

Wordsworth's own earliest memories were of the River Derwent, which ran at the foot of his father's garden,

> "And from its fords and shallows sent a voice
> That flowed along my dreams."

After his theft of the boat on Ullswater, huge and mighty forms were a trouble to his dreams. After his stay in Paris on the morrow of the September massacres, *and his stolen visit to that city a year later, when* he came face to face with the Terror, and saw Gorsas guillotined before his eyes, after these terrible experiences he suffered for months, nay for years, with few respites, from continual or recurrent nightmares. Night after night he lived again through the Terror, in ghastly visions of dungeon and scaffold :

> "Then suddenly the scene
> Changed, and the unbroken dream entangled me
> In long orations, which I strove to plead
> Before unjust tribunals, with a voice
> *Labouring*, a *brain confounded*, and a *sense*,
> Death-like, of treacherous desertion, felt
> In the last place of refuge—my own soul."

These nightmares persisted for two or three years, and were thus movingly recorded some ten years later. So much for Wordsworth's proneness to dreams.

Now there is a dream recorded in Book V of *The Prelude*, so vivid and articulate, and in its crazy way so significant, that it makes a *complete poem* by *itself*. Its circumstances, moreover, are set down with such faithful particularity as to furnish a complete psychological *explanation*. And its after-elaboration in the poet's waking mind, taken with the *dream itself*, does

afford us a glimpse into the process of creation. This was not, like *Kubla Khan*, a poem composed in a dream, but a dream composed into a poem. (I find no evidence that Wordsworth ever dreamed in verse.) It happened thus :—

One still summer noon the poet was seated alone in a seaside cave reading *Don Quixote*, when he fell to musing on a subject which often weighed on his mind about that time—the durable nature of poetry and geometric truth, and the pity it was that treasures so hardly won by the human spirit should be lodged in caskets so frail. As he mused thus, what with the stillness and warmth and the glitter of the waves, he dropped asleep. In his sleep he seemed to be in a boundless sandy desert, and by his side an Arab on a dromedary with a lance in his hand. Under one arm he bore a stone, and in the opposite hand a shell of surpassing brightness. The stone, he said, was Euclid's *Elements*; the shell was something still more precious. Held to the poet's ear it uttered, in a tongue unknown yet understood, loud prophecy of the approaching destruction of mankind by deluge. That prophecy, the Arab said, would be fulfilled, and he was even then on his way to bury the stone (which was Geometric Truth) and the shell (which was Poetry). The poet followed him, and now he seemed to be Don Quixote, yet still a Bedouin of the desert. But glancing back they saw, diffused over half the wilderness, a bed of glittering light; whereupon the Arab, urging his unwieldy beast to speed, fled away, " with the fleet waters of a drowning world in chase of him," and the poet awoke in terror. And there was the sea before him and the book at his side.

In this dream we can account at once for all the elements of the imagery: the mounted figure with his lance, the stone, the shell, the bed of glittering light—we see at once where all these came from. We see that the meaning, such as it is, simply prolongs the poet's last waking thought; and that the terror in which the

dream dissolves is merely the culmination of that mood of awe and melancholy in which it arose.[1] We cannot, of course, *see* the shaping spirit which out of those images, that thought, that mood, built a dream-structure as vivid, coherent, and significant as a work of art. But, with all its materials, conditions, and results before us, we come as near to seeing it at work as perhaps we can ever do from outside.

What follows is no less illuminative :—

> "[illegible] from the world of sleep
> [illegible]
> Protracted among endless solitudes ,
> Have shaped him wandering upon this quest !"

Here is one dream at least that Wordsworth did not forget, but remembered in all its details and frequently recalled through many years.[2] His waking imagination played with the creature of his dream, giving him an individuality, a history, a local habitation, and a purpose—a purpose with which, in fancy, he even sympathized. For, out of metaphor, it was a familiar thought with Wordsworth that in a world which so many millions are eager to manage and replenish, there is room and need for a few choice spirits dedicated to pure contemplation, " anchorites of knowledge," as he calls them in *The Excursion* [3]

II. HALLUCINATION.—From these dreams of sleep I pass to the one recorded occasion on which Wordsworth suffered from an hallucination. It was in Paris, in October 1792. When he had passed through the city

[1] Bergson says that dreams seldom arise out of what has been preoccupying the waking mind ; when they do, the dreamer awakes exhausted.

[2] We do not know for certain when Wordsworth had this dream of the mounted Bedouin, but from its place in *The Prelude* it would seem to belong to his Cambridge days.

[3] *Excursion* v, 29-36.

eleven months earlier, it was clamorous with debate in the Assembly and the rival clubs. Now it lay hushed in fear. A month before a gang of cut-throats had been let loose on the prisons where the Royalists lay, and after a series of mock trials had butchered fourteen hundred of them in cold blood. As he sat in his high and lonely room above the silent city, the thought of these September massacres, a bare month old, flooded the poet's brain: the fear gone by pressed on him almost like a fear to come; what has been, he thought, will be; such massacres will recur: and in this way he wrought upon himself till he seemed to hear a voice that cried to the whole city, "Sleep no more." "The trance," he continues, "fled with the voice to which it had given birth." A "trance" he calls it: it was not a dream—he was feverishly awake; it was a pure hallucination, like the voice that Macbeth heard after the murder of Duncan, a hallucination born of terror as Macbeth's was of guilt. Two other things are noteworthy in this experience. The voice which seemed to come from without him came really from a subconscious memory of Shakespeare's line,

> "Still it cried, 'Sleep no more,' to all the house,"

as is shown by the words in which Wordsworth describes it—

> "a voice that cried
> To the whole city, 'Sleep no more.'"

And this perhaps explains why, even in an imagination so predominantly visual as Wordsworth's, the hallucination took the form of a sound.

III. Waking Dreams or Reveries.—Though he never again suffered, so far as we know, from hallucinations, Wordsworth frequently indulged, most frequently (it would seem) at this period of his life, in exercises of fancy which he calls waking dreams or reveries. I use the words "indulged" and "exercises" with intent: these waking dreams were voluntary and pleasurable. At Cambridge he would often stand on

moonlight nights at the foot of a lovely, ivy-clad ash-tree, and gazing at it conjure up phantoms as fair as Spenser himself could have created. Walking on the banks of the Loire with Beaupuy, he would sometimes let his mind slip away from their serious conversation, to people the woods where François I had lived and loved with the creations of Italian and English romance; would hear in the noise of an unseen horseman's approach the hoofs of Erminia's palfrey, or Angelica's, thundering down the sylvan glades, see knights jousting beneath the trees, or catch from some hidden dell the loud merriment of Satyrs dancing around the captive Serena.

More impressive than these romantic fancies was the waking dream, or series of waking dreams, which Wordsworth had next year on Salisbury Plain. It was in August 1793. He had spent all July in the Isle of Wight, waiting on,

> "Through a whole month of calm and glassy days,"

in the hope (as I guess) of persuading some skipper to smuggle him over one night to France. Baffled by the continued calm, he decided at last to postpone his attempt till the Equinoctial gales should be blowing, and set off westward, meaning perhaps to fetch up at his friend Jones's house in North Wales. For three days he wandered over Salisbury Plain on foot and alone. As he viewed Stonehenge and the other Druidical remains with which the plain is strewn, Time rolled back with him and he saw the dim past of Britain "in vision clear": skin-clad Britons strode over the downs; the clash of spears was heard; then darkness, lit by the flames of human sacrifice and rent by the groans of victims; then light again, and in the light all round him long-bearded teachers with white staves pointing starward and earthward swaying to sweet music. An extraordinary experience, but not unique in its kind. "I know," says Dr Oliver Gogarty, speaking obviously from personal observation or personal

experience, "that there are times, given the place which is capable of suggesting a phantasy, when those who are sufficiently impressionable may perceive a dream projected as if external to the dreamy mind; a waking dream due both to the dreamer and the spot."[1] These words of Dr Gogarty's exactly describe the conditions, both as to the dreamer and the spot, which produced Wordsworth's reverie on Salisbury Plain, though surely few reveries can ever have been so vivid or so prolonged. Vivid as they were, these waking dreams were not hallucinatory. The dream images were phantasies and known to be such, pictures projected on to the screen of the plain, but not mistaken for part of the screen. Nor, on the other hand, were they "visions" in the sense in which I am about to use that term. Vision is revelatory; but these waking dreams did not in truth reveal

"The thing that hath been as the thing that is."

They were phantasies, as I have called them, constructed by a poet of extraordinary visual sensibility out of memories of what he had read about the Ancient Britons. Consequently his normal perceptions were not wholly in abeyance; the actual scene was still perceived, perceived indeed as a background to the creations of phantasy on which attention was fixed, but still present to sense. It is otherwise in vision.

I will add three observations which are to some extent conjectural.

In Book IX of *The Excursion*, Wordsworth puts into the mouth of the Pastor a vivid description of the ghastly Druid rites which might have been witnessed in old time by the Vale which is now a home of Christian peace. The picture which the Pastor conjures up is in substance identical with part of Wordsworth's account of his own reverie on Salisbury Plain. It is very improbable that Wordsworth had another such experience in the Lake District; in all likelihood he

[1] *As I was Going down Sackville Street*, p. 193.

has simply recalled the unique experience on Salisbury Plain, and transferred it—quite legitimately for his purpose—to his own "dear native regions," on the strength of

> "A few rude monuments of mountain-stone,"

which survived there and were believed (on what authority I know not) to be of Druidical origin.

It may be a mere fancy on my part, but I find something significant in the fact that these prolonged reveries on the banks of the Loire and on Salisbury Plain belong to a period in Wordsworth's life when his higher imagination, his "visionary power," was for a time impaired.

I find a similar significance in the fact that in later life, when his visionary power had certainly failed, and he was less *en rapport* with Nature, by which *alone that power was stimulated, he again grew fond of* such day-dreaming,

> "Pleased rather with some soft ideal scene,
> The work of Fancy,"

than with the fair region that lay around him. The sonnet that contains these lines belongs to 1833.

IV. Vision.—When I come to the subject of vision, and so touch the deepest stratum of Wordsworth's genius, such confidence as I feel comes largely from the fact that here I can lean on the most understanding of Wordsworth's critics. I could wish the paragraphs that follow to be read as so many footnotes to A. C. Bradley's Oxford Lecture on Wordsworth.

Vision is neither *dream, nor hallucination, nor* reverie. These are all subjective states, mere phantasies of our own creation, which bring us no knowledge of anything beyond us: in vision we perceive something not ourselves. So much all visionaries affirm; but when we press for a more positive account of their experience they fall back on metaphor. In vision, they tell us, a momentary transparency comes over the external world, revealing its inner constitution. Or the senses, they say,

are laid asleep, and we see into the life of things; as if, there being in ordinary perception four terms—soul: sense: nature: reality—in vision the middle terms are for a moment cancelled, and the extremes communicate directly. Or again, the world, they tell us, seems to melt into the soul, to become a dream, a prospect in the mind, as if all things were within the self. These are all attempts to express in terms of the logical understanding an experience that passes understanding. The last, which is Wordsworth's own, emphasizes the resemblance between vision and dream, and at once raises the question, "Is vision then illusory? Or is Nature itself an illusion?" Coleridge would have accepted the former conclusion and Blake the latter; but Wordsworth will not agree either, with Coleridge, that Nature lives only in our life, or, with Blake, that Nature is the work of the devil. No doubt, he will say, vision is in part creation; but in part it is perception also. Nature is in a sense appearance, since it is not the ultimate reality; but it is not illusion, for the reality revealed in vision is *its* reality or indwelling spirit, as it is the indwelling spirit of the perceiving mind. In vision the human intellect is wedded to this goodly universe in love and holy passion. . . . But these waters are too deep for me; I return thankfully to the dry ground of observable fact.

The first thing to be observed is the connection, whatever its nature, between Wordsworth's visionary power and two peculiarities of his mental constitution on which I have already dwelt—his sensitiveness to impressions beyond the range of normal eyes and ears, and those strange trances in which he grasped some solid object to save himself from falling into "the abyss of idealism." "At that time," he told Miss Fenwick, "I was afraid of these processes." In *The Prelude*, however, he speaks of moments when the light of sense

> "Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed
> The invisible world."

May we infer that in these boyish trances—for they seem all to belong to his schooldays—there was as yet no revealing flash? That the boy felt only that the light of sense was going out, and was afraid?

It is recorded of some Christian mystics that they attained to the Beatific Vision by purely inward meditation, unaided even by symbols, on the person and attributes of Christ. Wordsworth's visions were not of this purely inward origin. Though they transcended sense, they seem always to have been occasioned by some natural sight or sound, more often by sight than by sound, and *in their purest form by sight alone.* In the Wanderer's ecstasy

> "sound needed none,
> Nor any voice of joy."

He stood in the presence of the eternal silence.

"In their purest form," I have said; for there are degrees in vision. At its highest it is direct perception of eternal reality, the distinctive mystical experience which is called ecstasy. This is the "serene and blessed mood" of *Tintern Abbey*, the "high hour of visitation from the living God" of *The Excursion.* (The more theological expression belongs, it will be noted, to the later poem.) But there are degrees of vision that come short of ecstasy. The poem *To the Cuckoo* is visionary throughout; but it is not ecstatic, it has no religious implication. And other poems, not visionary throughout, contain visionary passages, such as the magical close of *Lucy Gray*. I have thought to see a touch of vision even in so plain a tale as *Alice Fell*; in another equally matter-of-fact poem, *The Sailor's Mother*, there is more than a touch of it, as is shown by the line

> "When from these lofty thoughts I woke."

It is in Wordsworth's most characteristic poems—I do not say his best, but his most characteristic poems, those that we feel no one else could have written—that

such visionary passages are most apt to occur. There is one section of his work in every poem of which this visionary quality is present in some degree, though I admit that it grows very faint in the poems of later date, is there (so to say) rather in intention than in fact. And because of the presence of this visionary quality Wordsworth entitled this section *Poems of the Imagination.* Imagination without vision is Fancy.

As vision may vary in degree so may it be accompanied with varieties of emotional tone. With ecstasy there is rapture, in which thought itself expires in "enjoyment." The tone of the poem *To the Cuckoo,* though not rapturous, is wholly pleasurable. But often the onset of the visionary experience is accompanied with disturbance or trouble :—

> "A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts ;"

> "While he was talking thus, the lonely place,
> The old Man's shape, and speech—all troubled me."

There is always some preparation for vision in the previous mood or thought of the visionary ; and to this, I believe, it owes its variety of degree and emotional tone. Ecstatic vision is possible only to an eye

> "made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy."

Of visions supervening on moods of surcharged emotion there are two instances in Book XII of *The Prelude.* The first of these was the occasion already mentioned, when, having lost his escort on the moor, he stumbled on a "bottom" where once a murderer had been hung in chains: his name could still be read cut in the turf at the foot of the mouldered gibbet.[1] On the second occasion, feverish with longing for home and holidays, he had wandered out alone to watch for the ponies that were to take him and his brothers home. Here the visionary mood, as recalled, clearly took some of its tone from retrospect; for within ten days of that homecoming his father died, and the boy looked on that loss as a chastisement for his wicked impatience. The significant thing about these two visions is that in both the boy was confronted, in the first immediately, in the second retrospectively, with the fact of death, which made the world of sense unreal.

Of conditions favourable to vision the most important was solitude. I will not labour a point which Bradley has made so convincingly, but content myself with two observations.

So important was solitude for the evocation of the visionary mood in Wordsworth, that when it did not exist in the original circumstances he was sometimes constrained to create it. The familiar poem on the *Daffodils* provides a neat instance. When Wordsworth actually saw those daffodils fluttering and dancing in the breeze beside Ullswater he was with his sister Dorothy. But apparently he could not poetize the scene until he had imagined himself alone with it. Hence the characteristic opening—

"I wandered lonely as a cloud."

Another, and a more striking, instance of the same thing is seen, as I have tried to show, in *Resolution and Independence*, where the loneliness of the scene is more

[1] So Wordsworth says. In fact the name was that of the murdered man

strongly emphasized, and the visionary character of the experience made more apparent.

Solitude is most easily found on moors and mountains, and most of Wordsworth's visions accordingly have a mountain or moorland setting. But not all. He could make an island of solitude for himself even in the midst of crowds: witness his London visions. There is his vision of the blind man in a London street, propped against a wall with a placard on his breast, at the sight of whom the poet's mind turned round "as with the might of waters," and he stood gazing on that steadfast, sightless face, "as if admonished from another world."[1] There is the picture, touchingly human yet visionary too, of the working man who had snatched a few minutes from his toil to sit beside the park railings with his sickly infant in his arms, bending over it as if to shield it from sun and air, and eyeing it "with love unutterable." And there were other moments in London when the crowds in the overflowing streets melted into

> "A second-sight procession, such as glides
> Over still mountains, or appears in dreams."

Recollections of such moments inspired *The Reverie of Poor Susan*, where the song of the caged thrush lifts the exile's heart for a little to heaven :—

> "'Tis a note of enchantment ; what ails her ? She sees
> A mountain ascending, a vision of trees ;
> Bright volumes of vapour through Lothbury glide,
> And a river flows on through the vale of Cheapside."

"Heaven lies about us in our infancy" is the central theme of the *Immortality* Ode ; yet Wordsworth nowhere records any special visionary experience from the days of his early childhood, of which indeed he has preserved

[1] So in *Resolution and Independence* :

> "Or like a man from some far region sent,
> To give me human strength, by apt admonishment."

very few recollections. It is true that in 1843 he spoke to Miss Fenwick as if the lines—

referred to this period, but the experiences which best answer to these lines belonged, as we have seen, to his tenth year. In boyhood, properly so called, when Nature was his playground, such experiences seem to have befallen him only when his mind was sensitized by conscious guilt, terror, or feverish expectation. In adolescence Nature became all in all to him; the years of adolescence seemed to him in retrospect to have been years of continuous exaltation; but it is impossible to frame a chronology of his visionary experiences between boyhood and manhood, or to say at what point in his glad youth he came to read a deeper meaning into them. The first clear evidence of such awareness occurs in his journal letter to Dorothy describing his Swiss tour in the autumn of 1790:—"Among the more awful scenes of the Alps"—more awful, that is, by contrast with the scenery round Lake Como—"I had not a thought of man, or a single created being, my whole soul was turned to him who produced the terrible majesty before me" a sentence which contains the germ of the sublimest passage in *The Prelude* In the turmoil of sexual and political passion that filled his mind during his residence in France and for a year or two thereafter, his visionary power was in abeyance, or at most was only fitfully recovered. When he had settled at Racedown with Dorothy in 1795 the fever left him; he once more smelt the dew and rain, and began to recall and recapture the high beatitude of youth: among the ruins of his revolutionary hopes he sought again the springs of his old happiness and found them still flowing. But if Dorothy gave him eyes and ears, it was the influence of Coleridge's more metaphysical mind that now led him, I believe, to think these youthful

experiences together, and seek in them a clue to the riddle of this painful earth. Alas! his second spring was short. Already in Book XII of *The Prelude* he is saying—

> "I see by glimpses now; when age comes on,
> May scarcely see at all."

In the *Immortality* Ode the radiance has been taken from his sight for ever. But the memory of it remained, to fortify the faith that looks through death.

The early decay of Wordsworth's visionary power may be connected with the fact that he was not, in the strict sense, a religious but a natural mystic. If its evocation depended always on some sense-stimulus, it would be more and more rarely evoked as his organic sensibility diminished with the approach of middle age. Its decay was not immediately followed by any general decline in his poetic powers. Other sources of inspiration remained, some of which did not altogether cease to flow even when he grew old. But though he continued to produce nature-poems, one tour after another yielding its sheaf of "Memorials," something was gone which had made the nature-poetry of his prime unique.

CHAPTER V

THEORY OF POETRY

WORDSWORTH did not think highly of literary criticism, even his own, and in his old age was inclined to blame Coleridge for pushing him into it. Is it ungenerous to suggest that this disparagement of his own critical efforts masks a silent withdrawal from positions which Coleridge's later criticisms had shown to be untenable? A poet may very well be a critic too; indeed all the best criticism of poetry in English has come from poets. Doubtless Wordsworth the poet means far more to us than Wordsworth the critic; but there can be no doubt either that his theory effectively helped his practice to turn the current of English poetry into the channel in which it flowed till the other day.

Judgment of Wordsworth's theory of poetry has been a good deal distorted by the excessive emphasis laid on his polemic against poetic diction. For this he largely has himself to blame; but the responsibility must be shared to some extent by Coleridge, whose criticism of Wordsworth's theories in the *Biographia Literaria* dwelt too exclusively on his views on poetic diction. I hope to show that these views are not in truth the essence of Wordsworth's theory of poetry, but rather what logicians call an inseparable accident, adhering to his theory rather than inherent in it, and adhering most closely at a particular stage in the development of his social and political opinions—the stage, I mean, which he had reached when he wrote the Advertisement to the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 and the Preface to the second and third editions of 1800 and 1802. It is in these, and especially in the Preface of 1802, with its large and important additions to the 1800 Preface, that we find the only sustained exposition of Wordsworth's general theory of

poetry. The Fenwick notes deal mostly with particular poems, and the Essays of 1815 are little to our present purpose, being devoted chiefly, the first of them to an attempt to show that other great poets as well as he had been neglected in their own day, the second to explaining the arrangement of his poems and the difference between "Poems of the Fancy" and "Poems of the Imagination."

Taking the 1802 Preface, then, as the most authoritative exposition of Wordsworth's poetic creed, we find that the essence of it lies not in his polemic against poetic diction, but in his conception of the origin, nature, and purpose of poetry, and of the function of the poet in a civil society. "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings"—that is his fundamental position. Modernist critics have assailed it with scorn: poetry, they tell us, is an art, not a dumping ground for emotion. Wordsworth might have rejoined that the implied antithesis between art and emotion is false, that emotionless art is a contradiction in terms. But I am concerned not to defend Wordsworth's position but to state it, and the sentence which I have quoted is the first article of his creed.

Now feeling commonly tends to express itself in speech or action:

> "Anger in hasty words or blows
> Itself discharges on its foes."

But the poet's feelings do not "discharge" themselves in this way. The poet, as poet, does not react to an impression immediately; he allows it to sink into his mind along with the feelings which it has excited: there it remains till its accidental ingredients have been, so to speak, precipitated, and what is left is its ideal or essential truth. When, later, the impression, thus purged of accidents, is recalled, the original feeling, similarly purged, revives with it. This is what Wordsworth means when he says that poetry takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity. He does not

mean, as is sometimes supposed, that the poet remembers in cold blood an experience which had moved him in the past. No: in the poet's mind the emotion which accompanied the original impression revives when the impression is recalled. There is nothing exceptional in this experience; all sensitive and imaginative people have had it in some degree. "I can remember pain, anger, spiritual exaltation, embarrassment, and feel them again almost as powerfully as at the first impact," says Mr James Bridie.[1] The ability thus to reconstruct an emotion, as Mr Bridie phrases it, belongs in an eminent degree to the poet, being in fact a portion of his native endowment, his "more than usual organic sensibility." As he writes, the poet lives through the *whole* experience again in an idealized form; and the reader of poetry in turn, so far as he may, lives through this secondary experience of the poet's as he reads.

The poet, then, is a man endowed with a "more than usual" capacity to perceive and feel, and to revive his perceptions and feelings in the absence of their objects: to be a great poet, let us add, he must have thought long and deeply. In all this he differs from his fellow-men only in degree: all men are able to perceive, feel, and think in some measure, and many are able even to imagine:

> "Oh! many are the poets that are sown
> By Nature, men endowed with highest gifts,
> The vision and the faculty divine,
> Yet wanting the accomplishment of verse."

It is this last gift, the accomplishment of verse, that distinguishes the articulate poet from other natures, even from other poetic natures. The poet can communicate his experiences, and communicate them in such a way as to give pleasure.

So much for the origin of poetry. Its nature will appear more clearly when we have considered its end or

purpose, and the means thereto, or, what comes to the same thing, the function of the poet in a civil society. Wordsworth felt as strongly as Keats that there is no worthy pursuit but the idea of doing some good for the world. He hoped that his poems would operate in their degree to extend the domain of sensibility for the delight, the honour, and the benefit of human nature. He trusted that it was their destiny to console the afflicted; to add sunshine to daylight, by making the happy happier; to lead the young and the gracious of every age to see, to think, and to feel, and therefore, to become more actively and securely virtuous. Such is the poet's office, and there is none more exalted. Wordsworth scorns people who talk of a taste for poetry, as if it were a thing as indifferent as a taste for rope-dancing or Frontiniac or sherry. Poetry is not a mere entertainment, a diversion for a patron's idle hours. It is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge, the impassioned expression that is in the countenance of all science. To be incapable of a feeling for poetry, in the true sense of the word, is to be without love of human nature and reverence for God. The poet is a *sacer vates*, a prophet, whose mission it is to

> "arouse the sensual from their sleep
> Of Death, and win the vacant and the vain
> To noble raptures."

This passionate assertion of the value of poetry for life is the heart of Wordsworth's doctrine.

If poetry is "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge," there can be no real hostility between poetry and science. It is true that in the mood of 1798, when he had flung away from Godwinism and was exalting feeling above cold logic, Wordsworth poured scorn on the minute philosopher who would peep and botanize upon his mother's grave. But what he scorned was the "false secondary power" of analysis divorced from feeling, which had usurped the name of Reason. For true science, the reverent and imaginative search for truth, he had nothing but admiration. (If there was one

man among his contemporaries to whom he looked up, it was Sir Humphry Davy.) So much is indeed apparent in the sentence which I have quoted from the Preface of 1802; but many years later Wordsworth stated his considered view expressly: "Admiration and love," he said, "to which all knowledge truly vital must tend, are felt by men of real genius in proportion as their discoveries in Natural Philosophy are enlarged; and the beauty in form of a plant or an animal is not made less but more apparent as a whole by a more accurate insight into its constituent properties and powers. A Savant, who is not also a poet and a religionist at heart, is a feeble and unhappy creature." [1]

Still, the poet is not a man of science; his immediate object is not knowledge but pleasure; he writes for all men, not for specialists only, and asks no knowledge from his readers beyond what they possess not as chemists or botanists but as men.

Neither is he a man of action. The poet does good for the world not by adding to men's knowledge or their comforts but by extending the range of human sensibility. In Wordsworth's view, as was pointed out in Chapter I, infant sensibility is the "great birthright of our being"; but in most of us it is gradually overlaid by a weight of custom or choked by the cares of the world; the film of familiarity dims our eyes to the divine beauty and mystery of Nature, and the lapse of years makes our hearts slow to feel and resigns them

"To selfishness and cold oblivious cares" [2]

It is the poet's office to break through this crust of custom, remove this film of familiarity, and soften these hardened hearts, in a word, to do for mankind what Wordsworth says that his sister did for him

"She gave me eyes, she gave me ears,
And humble cares and delicate fears,
A heart, the fountain of sweet tears
And love, and hope, and joy"

[1] See the Fenwick note on *This Lawn, a carpet all alive*
[2] *The Old Cumberland Beggar*, l 95

And this the poet can do because he has retained and augmented his native sensibility, and by his accomplishment of verse has power to make us see the world and our fellowmen through his eyes. No poet has described the poet's true function more admirably than Mr de la Mare:—"Burdened with the complexity of the lives we lead, fretting over appearances, netted in with anxieties and apprehensions, half smothered in drift of tepid thoughts and tepid feelings, we may refuse what poetry has to give; but under its influence serenity returns to the troubled mind, the world crumbles, loveliness shines like flowers after rain, and the further reality is once more charged with mystery."

If these are in truth the cardinal articles of Wordsworth's creed, why, it will be asked, has he laid such stress on poetic diction that it has commonly been taken to be the main theme of his prose Prefaces? For answer we must look at the dates of the first three editions of the *Lyrical Ballads*—1798, 1800, 1802. In 1798 Wordsworth's Revolutionary hopes were shattered by the French invasion of Switzerland, and for a time he turned away from politics. In 1802 his visit to Calais opened his eyes to the national danger, and he threw himself into the impending struggle against Napoleon. Between these dates, as I have said, he turned away from practical politics; but his democratic sympathies were still strong, and, balked in the sphere of action, they sought expression in poetry. At the heart of the democratic creed is the conviction that the things which men have in common are more important than those in which they differ: most important of all are those primary instincts and affections which belong to men as men, instincts and affections which by this time Wordsworth had come to regard as the deepest and most authoritative elements in human nature and those on which human happiness chiefly depends. These things, then, in Wordsworth's view, were the best themes for poetry; and they were to be seen, he believed, in their purest form, and found their most

natural expression, among simple country folk such as he had known in his boyhood.

Even in 1798 Wordsworth would not have denied that

> "Hearts as pure and fair
> May beat in Belgrave Square
> As in the lowlier air
> Of Seven Dials."

But he believed that such hearts were few, and that nineteen-twentieths of those who enjoy or seek consideration in Society were incapable of love to man or reverence for God. He was not alone in this opinion at that time. Not to speak of Rousseau and his condemnation of French Society, the Cambridge Evangelical, Isaac Milner, had written in 1794: "Now in general the lower classes only regard such things" —*i.e.* the Gospel—"and the great and high have, all over Europe, forgotten that they have souls." Wordsworth would not write to amuse a Society so deeply corrupted, nor employ its language: he would pipe a simple song for thinking hearts in language that cottagers and children could understand.

The *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798 were put forward as an experiment, "with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure" In the Preface of 1800 he defined his purpose more fully and carefully, and replaced the unfortunate phrase about "conversation in the middle and lower classes" by "a selection of language really used by men." Had he been content with this amended statement, and continued to call his *Ballads* an experiment, his manifesto would have been hard to challenge. But opposition and ridicule had stiffened his attitude. Gray had once asserted that the language of the age is never the language of poetry, except among the French. To controvert this it would have sufficed to point out that in English also some good poetry does not differ in diction from good prose. But this was not enough

✕ for Wordsworth. "We will go further," he says. "It may be safely affirmed that there neither is, nor can be, any *essential* difference between the language of prose and metrical composition." By going so far he took up a position which Coleridge found it easy to outflank.

Coleridge's criticisms are too well known to need restatement. It will be more profitable to salvage such portions of Wordsworth's doctrine as are true and valid, in spite of the provocative form into which his democratic bias made him cast them. No such bias influenced his analysis of the origin and nature of "so-called poetic diction," which is entirely convincing except when he deals with metre. Wordsworth was not the first English poet, nor the last, to revolt against an established poetic tradition. Donne revolted against the Petrarchan convention in love-poetry; and Pope against the conceits of the Metaphysicals; in our own day Kipling and Yeats rebelled against Tennysonianism, and modernist poetry arose in a revolt against the Georgians. The particular tradition against which Wordsworth revolted was that of the later Augustans, to which he had himself been enslaved when he wrote *An Evening Walk*. All these innovators, even Pope himself, regarded their revolt as a Return to Nature. How do such literary conventions arise? The earliest poets of all nations, says Wordsworth, wrote in a glow of feeling, and threw out daring, figurative expressions such as strong feeling spontaneously inspires. Their successors and imitators, finding such language consecrated, as it were, to poetry, used it in cold blood, hoping thereby to excite in their hearers or readers emotions which they did not feel themselves. In this process the language of poetry lost the image and superscription which the original poets had stamped on it. Wordsworth sought to remint this outworn coinage in the fire of his own heart and temper it afresh in the stream of living speech. His "experiment" succeeded occasionally even in the first volume of the *Lyrical Ballads*, frequently and triumphantly in the second,

which contains four of the "Lucy" poems, *Poor Susan*, *Lucy Gray*, *The Two April Mornings*, and *The Fountain*—masterpieces of a serious simplicity unique in English verse.

Wordsworth did not repeat his experiment on any large scale. Having shot his bolt in the *Lyrical Ballads*, he returned to the statelier style which was natural to him, and which even in 1798 he had used with noble effect in *Tintern Abbey*. W. P. Ker was of opinion that the difference in style between the 1802 volume and the 1807 volume was due to the fact that in the interval Wordsworth, who had long been familiar with Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton, became acquainted, or better acquainted, with Chaucer, Sidney, Drayton, and Daniel. In 1843 he told Miss Fenwick that he first became familiar with Chaucer, Drayton, and Daniel through Anderson's *Corpus of the British Poets*, which his brother John gave him when he visited Grasmere in 1800. Wordsworth's recollection was not quite right as regards Chaucer: he had known something of Chaucer in Cambridge days, when he laughed with him in the hawthorn shade beside the mill at Trumpington; but it was in 1801 that his modernizations of Chaucer were written, and some of the 1807 poems, notably *The Happy Warrior*, do recall well-languaged Daniel, whose "middle style" appealed to him and from whom he quotes a whole stanza in *The Excursion*. So far we may agree with W. P. Ker. But Wordsworth's most striking innovation in these years was his adoption of the sonnet form, in which he was to achieve some of his greatest successes. This innovation occurred to him one day in 1802, when Dorothy read him the whole of Milton's sonnets. The great series *On National Liberty and Independence* is Miltonic in form and spirit. The growing influence of Milton, obvious in the later "states" of *The Prelude*, may be detected even in the later books of the first "state," which was finished in 1805. Next to Milton, the poet to whom he was most akin was not Shakespeare or Chaucer, but Spenser.

The lovely poem called *A Farewell*, written in the summer of 1802, is beautifully Spenserian in movement and sentiment; indeed, he calls it "a Spenserian poem." But to return to the *Lyrical Ballads*.

The corruption of polite Society made Wordsworth choose his subjects from humble life. In choosing them from rustic rather than urban life he was influenced, no doubt, by the fact that he himself was country-bred; but the reasons that he gives for his choice are quite impersonal. He knew well enough that the country held gipsies and beggars as degraded as the dwellers in city slums, and loutish plough-boys little higher in the scale of feeling than the beasts they drove; but it was not among these that he looked for his subjects. His Michael is a peasant proprietor, and the Ewbank brothers, though fallen in the world, belong by birth to the same class, the class which had composed the "almost visionary mountain republic" of the Dales in his boyhood. When we remember this we shall find some truth in his claim that among such people the essential passions of the heart find a better soil to mature in, are more easily comprehended and more durable, are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of Nature and expressed in the simple language which hourly communication with Nature teaches.

Wordsworth would scarcely have maintained that the paternal and fraternal instincts are stronger in the country than in the town. But family affection contains other strands besides mere instinct: there is the closer intimacy which isolation forces on rural households; there is the sharing of common tasks, and even, in the shepherd's life, of common dangers; inwound with instinct these make a triple cord that is not easily broken. We must add yet another strand, the deep-seated love of the small hereditary farm, on which he had toiled for seventy years that he might hand it on to his son free as he had received it from his father—we must add this, I say, before we can fully comprehend

the tragic strength of the love that binds Michael to Luke. Other virtues too—contentment, neighbourliness, charity—could flourish in the kindly society of the Dales, where Labour still wore a rosy face, where the labourer was still a free man, and extreme penury and hunger's abject wretchedness,

"Mortal to body, and the heaven-born mind,"

were still unknown.

Again, the love of Nature, if not itself one of the essential passions of the heart, may be so entwined with them from the associations of childhood that it at once strengthens and is hallowed by them. Leonard Ewbank could not see the familiar becks of Ennerdale without remembering how he had carried his brother through them on his back; and at the heart of poor Susan's vision of mountain and dale is

"a single small cottage, a nest like a dove's,
The one only dwelling on earth that she loves"

The effect of such associations on language is more questionable. In the growth of language social environment counts for more than natural surroundings. The "stately speech" which "grave livers do in Scotland use" owes much less to Scottish scenery than to the English Bible. Yet I believe that it does owe something. Having known slum children in Glasgow who reached school age with no word for "sky" or "clouds" but "reek," I cannot but think that even in the matter of language the country-bred child, other things being equal, has a fairer seed-time for his soul.

There is something, then, to be said for all or most of Wordsworth's original contentions; but when he goes further and maintains that there is no essential difference between the language of good prose and that of metrical composition, advocacy becomes less easy. He persists in regarding metre as something "adventitious" (the word is his own), a kind of polish or varnish applied to the surface of poetry, but not an

essential part of its substance. He actually conjectures that the earliest poets may not have used metre at all, that it was a later embellishment, an after-thought; and if asked why, holding such views, he did not write in prose, would have replied in effect that, since he possessed "the accomplishment of verse," there was no reason why he should not give his readers this additional pleasure. He recognizes the power of metre to regulate or control emotion, and remarks (as his *bête noire* Hume had remarked before him) that by administering small shocks of expected pleasure at regular intervals it makes us able to endure, and even in a sense to enjoy, things in verse that would be too painful in prose. But he never inquires how metre originates, or, what comes to the same thing, how metre and diction are related in poetry. Had he done so, it might have occurred to him that the recurrences which regulate or control emotion are themselves a product of emotion. Consider the famous stanza in which the leech-gatherer is compared to a "travelled" boulder, and that in turn to a basking seal. These similes would be as grotesque in prose as some of the words and constructions in which they are expressed would be unnatural. But in verse they are entirely right, because all of them—figures, words, and constructions—are generated by the same exalted mood as generates, and is signified by, the metre.

It is hard to say how far this heresy of Wordsworth's was a corollary of his general theory of poetic diction, and how far it was due to the limitations of his ear. I mean his ear for verse: that he had a poor ear for music is of no consequence in this connection—Tennyson and Swinburne are reckoned melodious poets, though both were tone-deaf. Wordsworth's ear for verse was not bad, like Byron's, but it was finical rather than fine: we learn from Leigh Hunt, for instance, that he objected to the similar endings in Shakespeare's line about the bees—

"The singing masons building roofs of gold"—

a repetition which Keats with surer instinct felt to be in harmony with the continued note of the singers. There are many memorable lines in Wordsworth, but none that we remember for the mere beauty of its sound, as we remember Shakespeare's

> "Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang,"

or Milton's

> "To save the Athenian walls from ruin bare."

Had Wordsworth's feeling for the sound of words been as delicate as his feeling for their sense, he might have done for the metres of English poetry what he did for its diction, and freshened their jaded rhythms with new cadences caught from the living voice. As it was, his metrical innovations were few and unsuccessful; for the most part he stuck to accepted measures, and moved most easily when he moved in the strictest bonds, in the sonnet's narrow room or the firm frame of the regular ode.

However we may account for his views on metre, it is clear enough that some of Wordsworth's failures—when he did fail—were due to a too rigid adherence to his theories. He was misled to some extent by the example of Burns. It was Burns, he tells us, who had shown him

> "How Verse may build a princely throne
> On humble truth"

But Burns had advantages denied to Wordsworth. When he wanted to go behind the Augustan tradition of English poetry he could fall back, both for diction and for metre, on a native Scottish tradition centuries old. He may have stiffened his diction with some strands of homespun Westland dialect, but the staple of it is traditional literary Scots; his metres too are all traditional, even the one that bears his name. In English, Wordsworth found no model for popular poetry except the ballad, and even among ballads his

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choice was limited. The grand old ballads of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries would not serve his purpose, with their chivalric themes and archaic diction, so that he was reduced to the humdrum broadside ballad of which *The Babes in the Wood* is a not unfavourable specimen. The occasional flatness of the *Lyrical Ballads* in style and rhythm may be blamed on these poor models.

Most of his failures, however, were due less to theoretical errors than to defects of temperament. It is not quite true to say that Wordsworth had no sense of humour: he could apply with gusto to a drunken but avaricious curate the jibe that he could take "any *given* quantity"; he could even joke about his own habit of "booing" on the public roads. "He never resented a jest at his own expense," says Aubrey de Vere, and goes on to tell how heartily he laughed when, after they had knocked three times in vain at the door of a London house, de Vere exclaimed,

"Dear God! the very houses seem asleep."

Still, his sense of humour was admittedly not lively, and he was himself aware that things might sound ludicrous to others which did not sound ludicrous to him. This lack of humour—say rather, this stiffness in the risible faculty—betrays him sometimes into childishness like that of the lines—

"And still, the more he works, the more
Do his weak ankles swell"—

which spoil the affecting story of Simon Lee; sometimes into grandiloquence, as when he calls a stage-coach "an itinerant vehicle," or a kilt a "plaided vest," or an expectant mother "the thankful captive of maternal bonds"—phrases indistinguishable from the "so-called poetic diction" which he had so vigorously denounced. The tone of the context generally makes it easy to distinguish such unconscious pomposities from the deliberate mock-heroic of

"And at the Hoop alighted, famous inn."

The other side of this humorlessness is the lab
jocosity which disconcerts us in *The Idiot Boy*
that poem Wordsworth said, "In truth, I never w
anything with more glee"; and what I have calle
jocosity evidently comes from his efforts to convey
"glee" to his readers. We know from his lette
John Wilson that he regarded idiots as beings wh
life is "hidden with God," and looked on the cond
of poor parents towards these afflicted children as t
greatest triumph of the human heart. But such sen
ments do not make for glee. That comes from Word
worth's sense of the capacity of this particular idiot f
joy, a capacity which "shares the nature of infinity.
All that night, so harrowing to Betty and Susan, Johnn
had sat on his pony before the waterfall, enraptured
with the moonshine and the hooting of the owls.

"The cocks did crow to-whoo, to-whoo,
And the sun did shine so cold"—

these words, reported to Wordsworth by his friend Poole, were the foundation of the whole poem, and the thought of this rapture, though not revealed till the end, irradiates the poet's mind throughout like the moon behind a cloud.

Once or twice the purity of Wordsworth's poetic motive seems to be alloyed with a baser element, a trace of what one must call arrogance. The Prologue to *Peter Bell* offends us with its arrogant motto, "Brutus will start a spirit as soon as Caesar," proclaiming, as it were, the author's intention to show us how *he* would have written *The Ancient Mariner*. The austerity of *The White Doe of Rylstone*, its deliberate avoidance of outward action, seems to convey a tacit rebuke to the stirring author of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. (Next year Wordsworth acknowledged the receipt of *Marmion* with the chilling remark: "I think your end has been attained. That it is not in every respect the end which I should wish you to propose to yourself, you will be well aware.") *The White Doe*,

remains a wonderful poem; but what are we to say of *Ellen Irwin*, that hapless travesty of *Helen of Kirkconnel*, for which the hardiest Wordsworthian must blush?

Two defects remain in which theory and temperament seem to conspire. The first is a tendency to didacticism. We resent poetry which, in Keats's phrase, "has a design upon us." Wordsworth once told Lady Beaumont that he wished to be regarded as a teacher or as nothing. A natural wish in a dedicated spirit, but its insistence sometimes made him forget Dryden's golden maxim, a maxim which he accepted in theory, that Poesy only instructs as it delights. This tendency grew on him in and after *The Excursion*. His poetic fire was dying down, but he still had much of value to say, and used his proved accomplishment of verse to say it in.

Akin to this defect is another which may be illustrated best from *Peter Bell*. That poem, though written in 1798, was withheld from publication till 1819, largely in deference to Charles Lamb's judgment. Now Lamb knew poetry when he saw it, and we shall understand and share his objections if, after reading M. Legouis's summary, we turn back at once to the poem itself. For we shall discover to our surprise that, except for one or two small patches of pure poetry, Wordsworth's verse is actually less interesting than M. Legouis's prose. The conclusion is obvious: the real interest of *Peter Bell* is not poetical at all; it is psychological.[1] Like Mr Masefield's *The Everlasting Mercy*, *Peter Bell* is a study in the psychology of religious conversion. As such it is highly interesting and illuminating. It tells how the hardened crust of Peter's brutal nature is broken through and his heart made contrite by the cumulative effect, stroke after stroke, of a series of natural happenings which his superstitious mind interprets supernaturally. Words-

[1] Coleridge did not fall into this error. Of *The Three Graves* he wrote: "It is not presented as poetry. . . . Its merits, if any, are exclusively psychological."

worth was deeply interested in psychology, especially in those years when he was meditating *The Prelude*. In truth he threw more light on the workings of the human heart than any English poet—I do not speak of the great novelists—had done since the Elizabethan age. But he did not always succeed in transmuting his discoveries into poetry. There is something ominous in his declaration, in the Preface of 1800, that his chief object in the *Lyrical Ballads* was to make his themes interesting "by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature: chiefly as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement." But this in itself is a task for the psychologist: the poet must not only instruct but delight; and this Wordsworth sometimes fails to do. He fails in *Peter Bell*. He fails, for much the same reason, in *Goody Blake* and the *Anecdote for Fathers*. *Goody Blake* is another study in superstition, this time of the effect of a curse on a coarse but superstitious mind, a study psychologically interesting but imperfectly poetized. The *Anecdote for Fathers* merely records Wordsworth's discovery—not a new one—of the odd reasons children will give when pestered with questions: Wordsworth evidently saw more in it, but what more he saw he has failed to convey.

CHAPTER VI

POLITICS

WORDSWORTH once said that for one hour's thought he had given to poetry he had given twelve to the condition and prospects of society. The statement, though not true of his *Lyrical Ballads* days, was true at the time he made it, and serves at least to remind us that some of his noblest verse and all his most majestic prose was inspired by political passion.

The fundamental fact about Wordsworth's politics is the fact that he was a true-born Englishman. Except for a half-legendary Scottish ancestress, his forbears on both sides of the house were pure English for many generations. His roots were struck very deep in English soil—how deep, it took a winter in Germany to teach him.

The next thing to remember is that he was country-born and country-bred. The England that he pined for in Germany was his own countryside. He knew it intimately, and loved it with all his heart. And he loved, if he did not quite know, its people: the city proletariat, which the Industrial Revolution brought into being in his lifetime, was always more or less strange to him, and its aspirations were, and remained, beyond the range of his sympathies.

Finally, we must not forget that Wordsworth belonged by birth to the middle class. He was not an aristocrat like Byron or Shelley, nor a man of the people like Burns or Tom Paine. Hence a strain of moderation—I had almost said a streak of caution—which kept him from going all lengths even in his Radical days, but also set limits to his understanding of the working class, though not to his affection for them. He loved the people and wished them well, but he could not hob-nob with them as Burns did. Like

Scott he was the son of an attorney, and might have grown up as stout a Tory as Scott but for a circumstance that clouded his youth. His father, John Wordsworth, was factor to Sir James Lowther, and was somehow induced to lend him all his savings. This Sir James Lowther was a local despot, half-crazy in his petty tyranny, and when John Wordsworth died he refused to disgorge the loan; in fact he never did disgorge it, and it was not till his death that the Wordsworths came into their patrimony—a circumstance little calculated to foster in a lad of Wordsworth's stiff, moody temper that respect with which Burke says we look to nobility.

At school he mingled with his social equals, sons of yeomen or (like himself) of professional men; even between master and man a feeling of equality still existed in the Dales of his boyhood. From the school republic of Hawkshead and the "almost visionary republic" of the Dales, he passed to another republic in Cambridge, where all men were equal as scholars and gentlemen, so that he reached manhood without meeting any one who claimed consideration on the score of rank. When I add that his temper was naturally vehement and impatient of constraint, and that personal freedom was the breath of his nostrils, it will be seen that his mind was ready soil for the Revolutionary notions of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. So much so that when the French Revolution actually came he felt that it was nothing out of nature, and had come rather late than soon. This helps to explain his apparent indifference to the question of negro slavery which was torturing Cowper at this very time. To Wordsworth it seemed merely the rottenest branch of a rotten tree, to the root of which the axe had been laid. Only let all go well with France and slavery would vanish with the rest of our evil heritage from the past.

But I anticipate. Wordsworth's interest in public affairs was first aroused not by the French Revolution but by the aftermath of the American War. He had

been too young to know or think much about that war while it lasted; but when it was over disbanded men began to straggle back to the Lakes. One of these he met during his first Long Vacation—he has recorded their meeting in an unforgettable episode in *The Prelude*; others he must have heard of; and from what he saw and heard he conceived a horror of war with all the suffering it inflicts on the poor, especially on poor women, its most innocent and helpless victims. There is nothing so moving in *An Evening Walk*, which was begun at this time, as the lines that tell of the widow and orphans of the soldier who lies

"Asleep on Bunker's charnel hill afar."

So too the Female Vagrant in *Guilt and Sorrow* and Margaret in *The Ruined Cottage* are both victims of the American War.

When the Bastille fell in July 1789, Charles James Fox declared that its fall was the greatest thing that had ever happened in history, and the best. We do not know what Wordsworth's feelings were at the time; but France must have been in all men's mouths at Cambridge during the session of 1789-1790, and when the summer term was over he set off with his friend Jones for a walking tour in France and Switzerland—a tour that was to have momentous consequences. They landed at Calais on 13th July 1790. It was the eve of the day on which the King was to swear fidelity to the new Constitution, and the whole land was wild with joy—

"France standing on the top of golden hours,
And human nature seeming born again."

For three days Wordsworth and Jones sailed down the Rhone in company with a number of deputies who were returning from Paris to Marseilles. The young Englishmen were rapturously welcomed as visitors from the land of the free; the universal enthusiasm swept them off their feet; they joined the jubilant throng;

they laughed, they quaffed, they danced the carmagnole. From Lyons they struck off for Switzerland, whither we need not follow them except to note that even Wordsworth's new-born enthusiasm for France could not stifle a pang at the sight of desecrated monasteries. The *Descriptive Sketches* published in 1793 give the poet's impressions of what he saw on this tour; but their Rousseau-like praise of the child of Nature and their denunciations of despots belong rather to the Wordsworth of 1793 than to the Wordsworth of 1790: his journal-letter to Dorothy, written at the time, contains no such reflections.

Returning to Cambridge, he took his degree in January 1791, and then hung about in London and elsewhere for nearly a year, unable to settle on a profession. While he was in London he heard Burke speak in the House of Commons. Marvellous orator! but as he wound away his never-ending horn the strain, transcendent as it was, grew tedious "even to a young man's ear." His mind was not yet ripe for Burke. Then in November he suddenly went off again to France, ostensibly to perfect himself in the language, but drawn also, one suspects, by the memory of what he had seen there the year before. Passing through Paris he pushed on to Orleans, and thence to Blois. In these towns he made two friends, of one of whom he has told us nothing. The other was Michel Beaupuy, an officer in garrison at Blois, the one Republican in a mess of Royalists. Beaupuy's impassioned eloquence, and the misery he saw with his own eyes among the hunger-bitten peasantry, converted him to the Revolutionary faith. He became a patriot of the world; his heart was all given to the people and his love was theirs. October found him back in Paris, debating what to do. Should he join the Girondins, put himself at their head, and, if Fate willed, perish with them? He did not do so. Did his heart fail him? Or did the Muse herself defend her son? All we know is that before he could take any fatal step he was dragged back to London,

"dragged," he tells us, "by a chain of harsh necessity." What he does not tell us is that the chain was of his own forging. The other friend whom he had made in France was a young Frenchwoman, Annette Vallon, with whom he fell violently in love. He had known for some months that she was with child; now her time was near, and he hurried back to England, "compelled," as the franker language of the original *Prelude* informs us, "by mere want of funds." He may have meant to return to Annette as soon as he had procured them; if so, he was too late. In January 1793 Louis XVI was executed, in February France went to war with Britain, and Wordsworth's return was cut off. In October, however, as I have already related, he managed to reach Paris, found the Terror raging, and fled for his life.

While he was in London in 1793, Wordsworth onsorted sometimes with those Radicals who sat at illiam Godwin's feet and tried to draw intellectual pport for their faith from the doctrines of his *Political ice.* In politics Godwin was what we should now call a philosophical anarchist. His ideal was a loose federation of states each so tiny that every one in it should know every one else, since argument would be the sole instrument of government, all men being naturally free, rational, perfectible, and (in essentials) equal. It was under the spell of these lofty sophistries that Wordsworth made his first essay in political writing, in the shape of a *Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff*, in which he championed the cause of the French Revolution, defending even the execution of the King, and scoffing at Burke as an "infatuated moralist." Then turning to Britain he demonstrates the evils that flow from monarchy and aristocracy, with its unnatural law of primogeniture. If the general will is to prevail under representative government, the franchise must be universal and equal, parliaments short, re-election forbidden, and the powers of the executive reduced to a minimum, since government is at best but a necessary

1798-1799. That "melancholy dream," as he calls it, taught him two things: that his passion for France was dead, and that the love of England was twined about his heart-strings. But the England that he loved was not yet the England of history. In his youth he cared little for English history compared with the histories of Greece and Rome. The England that he loved was the England that his eyes had seen, the "dear native regions" of his earliest verse, the mountains among which he had felt the joy of his desire for Lucy and the green fields that her dying eyes had surveyed. To these dear native regions he returned in December 1799 and made his home among them for the rest of his days.

At Grasmere he prepared a second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, and in 1801 sent a copy of it to Charles James Fox with a letter which forms an important document in the history of his political development. He is still a democrat, as earnest as ever to show that men who do not wear fine clothes can feel deeply. But he no longer talks of the general will, or of universal suffrage, or even of the misery that war inflicts on the poor. What concerns him now is the threat to their domestic life which he sees in the spread of the factory system that devours their children and the operation of the new poor law that will break up their homes. He is back in his own countryside; his ideal now is that "almost visionary mountain republic" which he describes in his *Guide to the Lakes* as still existing in his boyhood towards the head of the Dales, a perfect republic of shepherds and agriculturists like his own Michael, each on his small hereditary farm. "Neither high-born nobleman, knight, nor esquire was there; but many of these humble sons of the hills had a consciousness that the land, which they walked over and tilled, had for more than five hundred years been possessed by men of their name and blood." Among such men family affection is found at its purest and strongest, when the love of father and son is bound up

the love of hereditary property in land. "There o property so sacred as the property of the poor." v the unsolved riddle of social justice haunted rdsworth's mind in these years appears sometimes unexpected places. We should scarcely have read y thought of it into *Resolution and Independence*; t in a letter of June 1802 he counts it among the hings that make the figure of the old leech-gatherer o impressive that he moves about in lonely places, ' carrying with him his own fortitude, and the necessities which an unjust state of society has entailed upon him."

During these years Wordsworth took little interest in foreign politics. But in August 1802, after the Peace of Amiens, he spent a month at Calais with Annette and their daughter, and doubtless made some settlement on them in view of his approaching marriage. This visit completed his disillusionment with France. The liberator had turned tyrant. Henceforth France, Napoleonic France, was the enemy, and England, with all her faults, the last hope of freedom. And now in Wordsworth's hands, as in Milton's, the sonnet became a trumpet, to rouse England from her Mammon-worship and nerve her for the struggle against the tyrant. As the struggle deepened, and ally after ally went down, Austria in 1805, Prussia in 1806, Wordsworth's courage rose to meet the rising peril:—

> "Another year!—another deadly blow!
> Another mighty Empire overthrown!
> And We are left, or shall be left, alone;
> The last that dare to struggle with the Foe."

And is the moral despair? Never!

> "O dastard whom such foretaste doth not cheer!"

The integrity of soul which comes to those who h found a cause to live and die for plucks a sacred out of the heart of danger:—

> "There came a Tyrant, and with holy glee
> Thou fought'st against him"

he loudest note of the trumpet proclaims again and gain the supreme duty of hope, of

> "Hope, the paramount *duty* that Heaven lays,
> For its own honour, on man's suffering heart."

'I began with hope," he said in 1808, "and hope has inwardly accompanied me to the end."

If the poet was sometimes tempted to listen to the linnet's song and shut his ears to the sound and fury of European war, he was effectually roused from such dreams when the French overran Portugal, and Napoleon put his brother on the throne of Spain. In 1808 Wellesley defeated Junot at Vimiero, but was superseded by Burrard and Dalrymple, who forthwith concluded a convention with Junot at Cintra, allowing the French to withdraw to France with all their arms and even their booty. The storm of indignation which this Convention of Cintra aroused in Britain found a voice in Wordsworth. In high-piled periods like thunder-clouds he denounced the British generals not only for surrendering an important military advantage—in which he was possibly wrong, but also and chiefly for sacrificing the interests and, above all, the honour of our allies—in which he was unquestionably right. He thundered against the pusillanimity which regarded Napoleon as invincible, and proclaimed that in attacking a nation he had released against him forces over which his big battalions could not prevail. He had violated the sanctuary of the human heart and insulted its mightiest and holiest affections; henceforth his foes were exultations, agonies, and love, and man's unconquerable mind. In all this Wordsworth was a true prophet, as Napoleon himself came at last to allow. Hitherto he had vanquished governments; it was when he trampled the embers of German nationalism into flame and outraged the national sentiment of Spain that he dealt himself a wound that drained away the life-blood of his Empire. "The Peninsular War," he said afterwards, "was a running sore." The profes-

sional politicians could not see these things because they had not fathomed the penetralia of human nature. Man's life is not sustained by bread alone but by the feelings of the heart in his breast, by self-respect, by pride and patience in adversity, by admiration, gratitude, and love. "Now to the existence of these blessings," Wordsworth declares, "national independence is indispensable; and many of them it will itself produce and maintain." National independence, civil liberty, a just constitution—these are the three great blessings of civilized society; but the greatest of these is national independence; and it means even more to the poor man than to the rich. The peasant has no partial interests or false philosophies to distract him from love of the soil that bred him and pride in his country's heroes. It was not the Spaniards that Wordsworth was addressing but worldlings at home, who, if they *cared nothing for the ruined honour of another country* must care little for the honour of their own. It was Britain's duty, he proclaimed, having secured her own independence, to help other nations to win theirs; and he preached a truceless war against Napoleon until French militarism should be crushed.

Wordsworth's tract *On the Convention of Cintra*, neglected when it appeared and for a hundred years after, has taken on a new meaning for our generation. It revealed him as the prophet of a force which was thenceforth to shape the destinies of Europe, for good or for evil—the force of Nationalism. Wordsworth's own Nationalism was sane. He saw that there were cases in which neighbouring and kindred nations, like England and Scotland, might agree to forgo some of the pride of separate nationhood in order to set their common independence on a broader and surer foundation; and he looked forward to a time when a United Peninsula, formed by the free union of Spain and Portugal, a United Italy, a United Germany, and a France reduced to her natural boundaries, with Russia and this United Kingdom, should create a new balan

of power in Europe and for ever prevent the rise of another Napoleon.

Some of Wordsworth's hopes were fulfilled in the nineteenth century. Alas! the fervent prophet did not foresee that in the twentieth the Age of Tyrants would return, and Nationalism spawn its own Napoleons. He did not foresee them, but he knew the breed: he might be writing not for his own age but for ours when he thus describes the invasion of Spain:—

"It is, I allow, a frightful spectacle to see the prime of a vast nation propelled out of their territory with the rapid sweep of a horde of Tartars; moving from the impulse of like savage instincts; and furnished, at the same time, with those implements of physical destruction which have been produced by science and civilization. . . . With a like perversion of things, . . . these appetites of barbarous (nay, what is far worse, of barbarized) men are embodied in a new frame of polity, which possesses the consistency of an ancient Government, without its embarrassments and weaknesses. And at the head of all is the mind of one man who acts avowedly upon the principle that every thing, which can be done safely by the supreme power of a state, may be done."

Wordsworth did not underrate the strength of the enemy. But his faith in moral forces never wavered. "For present annoyance," he declared, "his power is, no doubt, mighty: but liberty . . . is far mightier; and the good in human nature is stronger than the evil."

For more than twelve years Wordsworth had thrown himself heart and soul into the struggle against Napoleon; by the end of it his political views had undergone a profound change. In the tract *On the Convention of Cintra*, the accent of the old Girondin can still be heard in many a phrase; he still acclaims Washington as the chief of men, still denounces the American War and the first attack on the young French

Republic as crimes, asserts the supremacy of the Legislature and calls the King the Chief Magistrate; though he slights the "paradoxical reveries" of Rousseau, he still speaks of the "general will" and still believes in the natural goodness of the plain man. That was in 1808. By 1818 he was zealously supporting Lord Lonsdale's Tory nominee for the representation of Westmoreland; by 1823 Mrs Clarkson found him and his family "completely Torified." He ensconced himself deeper and deeper in English institutions, identified himself more and more closely with the Established Church and the landed interest, and for their sakes opposed the repeal of the Test Act, the Catholic Relief Bill, and the first Reform Bill; resisted the admission of Dissenters to Cambridge "tooth and nail"; and actually withstood the Dissenters' Chapels Bill, which proposed no more than to give Dissenters a legal title to their own meeting-houses, chapels, and burial grounds! Nevertheless, Wordsworth maintained that, though he might have erred in his judgment of persons, his principles had never changed. In one sense this was true: he never ceased to love the people and desire their welfare. But politics have to do with means no less than ends; and to claim that your principles are unchanged because you still desire the general good is as if a man gazing at the sun from dawn to dusk should maintain that he has always been looking in the same direction because he has always been looking at the same object.

It is too simple a solution to say either that Wordsworth sold himself for a sinecure,[1] or that he merely gained wisdom with age. Wordsworth's was not a simple nature, nor were the situations simple with which he had to deal. Consider first his attitude to foreign affairs. Crabbe Robinson imagined a future biographer noting Wordsworth's silence on the struggles

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of Spain and Prussia for civil liberty and of Greece for national independence, and concluding that the great poet had died in 1814 "as far as life consists in active sympathy with the temporary[1] welfare of his fellow creatures." Wordsworth took the jibe in good part: "I could give you the other side," he said. Had he done so he might have maintained that, Spain and Prussia having secured their independence, what they made of it was their affair. But how could the author of the Cintra tract have defended his silence on the Greek War of Independence, or explained away the fact that, when Canning called in the New World to redress the balance of the Old by recognizing the South American Republics, his only reaction was a fear of offending Spain? The truth seems to be that his ardent patriotism had burnt up his cosmopolitanism; from a patriot of the world he had become a patriot of England, and anxiety for her left little room in his mind for remoter cares. When that anxiety had relaxed a little, or had itself for the moment become a little remote during his Italian tour of 1837, he was able to interest himself in Italy's aspirations and to write sympathetically of the Carbonari. His old interest in Spain also revived to some extent: in 1838 he sent Crabbe Robinson a "squib," as he called it, on Colonel Evans, who had commanded a British levy against the Carlists in 1835; and in 1844 we find him grieving over "state murders committed in Spain without remorse." But by that time he had really grown old, fearful of all change, and content in all things to await "God's good time."

I turn next to his views on domestic politics. In 1847 Crabbe Robinson wrote of Wordsworth: "Indeed by nature he is a liberal, tho' accidents have cast him among the adversaries." The first of these "accidents" was the attitude of the various political parties to the prosecution of the war with Napoleon. When invasion was expected in 1803, Wordsworth had

[1] Did Crabbe Robinson mean "temporal"?

implored Britons of all parties to have one soul and keep Britain free or perish to a man. The appeal was ineffectual. Many of the Whigs were lukewarm in their opposition to France, and some of the Radicals spoke and wrote as if they had been briefed by Napoleon. To Wordsworth the prosecution of the war *à outrance* was a matter of life and death, and only in the Tory ranks did he find a party that was as resolute for it as he. British freedom, he felt, was doubly imperilled when the foreign foe was aided by dissension at home; and as the war went on dissension spread until to his eyes it threatened actual revolution. In the light of events we may look on his fears as exaggerated, but they were shared by one of the stoutest hearts among his contemporaries. Sir Walter Scott feared a Jacquerie: "The ground is mined below our feet," he wrote to Southey in 1812.

The fear of foreign conquest vanished with the victory of Waterloo; but the fear of revolution remained. In the "dear years" that followed the end of the long war, unemployment and destitution, amounting in some districts to starvation, fanned the flames of popular discontent and kept Wordsworth's fears at fever-heat. Next to foreign conquest, revolution was of all things the most abhorrent to him. Even in his Republican days he had recoiled from the bare idea of a revolution in England. He had lived through one revolution and could not bear the thought of enother. The foci of sedition, as he saw it, lay in the reat manufacturing towns,[1] where Radicalism and Dissent were rife; the landed interest and the Church f England were the twin pillars of national stability. These were the sentiments that inspired his *Address to e Freeholders of Westmoreland* in 1818.

By 1820 the danger of revolution had receded. In e next decade Wordsworth's fears transferred them-

[1] In 1812 he had written: "The lower orders have been for wards of thirty years accumulating in pestilential masses of orant population."

selves to the Catholic Relief Bill, which he opposed vehemently, partly from a constitutional horror of Popery and priestcraft, but chiefly because he believed that the ultimate aim of the advocates of the Bill was nothing short of Irish independence, and therefore saw in it the thin end of a wedge which, driven home, would disrupt the Empire. Once again France was the danger; he saw Britain, with a hostile Ireland on her flank, faced with a France that had reabsorbed the Low Countries and stretched, a mighty power, from Bayonne to the mouths of the Rhine.

Scarcely was that cause lost [1] when a new and more pressing danger loomed up in the shape of the First Reform Bill. That surely was the beginning of the end. The transfer of political power from the landed to the manufacturing interest would be followed by a determined attack on privilege, property, and religion. Even if it did not come to that, to sacrifice agriculture to manufacture would turn us into "the white negroes of the world." In these years Wordsworth despaired of England. He spoke of taking refuge in Austria: "I shall look for the quietest nook I can find in the centre of Austria"—so he wrote in July 1832.

But as time went on, and nothing very direful happened, he plucked up heart again and recovered some of his confidence in mankind. In 1841 Crabbe Robinson reports: "W.'s tone is far more liberal than it used to be." Crabbe was a Liberal, and naturally made the most of any sign of grace in his idol; but in 1843 Wordsworth himself wrote to Henry Reed: "I will not conceal from you that, as far as the people are capable of governing themselves, I am a democrat"; and in 1847 he told the Chartist Thomas Cooper: "I have always said that the people were right in what they asked," adding that they were sure to have the franchise as knowledge increased, but must avoid violence.

The liberal side of Wordsworth's nature, submerged for many years by alarm after alarm, is least

[1] The Catholic Relief Bill was passed in 1829.

apparent in his attitude to Dissent, where *odium theologicum* [illegible] and most consistently [illegible] He could not bear to [illegible] devoured by the Moloch of the factory system; in a famous passage in *The Excursion*, of which H.M.I. Mr Arnold made unseemly fun, he pleaded eloquently for compulsory national education; even when supporting the Government candidate in 1818 he censured the Government for their neglect of Poor Law Reform; and in 1835, at the nadir of his political despair, he asserted uncompromisingly that the unemployed had a *right* to State-aid.

In the field of Social Reform, then, Wordsworth might fairly claim to have been true to his principles. But the rest of his political philosophy changed as his confidence in mankind ebbed or flowed—and it ebbed for many years, reaching low-water mark after the passing of the Reform Bill. On the morrow of the French Revolution he dreamed that human nature had been born again. Regenerated man stood erect in his manhood, free, rational, and good, according to Nature's holy plan. Government, in Swift's phrase, was "a plain thing, and fitted to the capacity of many heads"; universal and equal suffrage was the panacea for all human ills. (Even in those days, however, Wordsworth would not make a clean sweep of the British Constitution which contained such valuable elements as the English Common Law and Trial by Jury.) As the Revolution swept on its course, he awoke to the fact that human nature had not been reborn; that men do not turn into angels overnight; on the contrary, that once the crust of custom is broken through ugly monsters rise from the depths; that government is not a plain thing, and unbridled democracy is a short step to tyranny. Then, as he explored the penetralia of human nature, he discovered that in civil society as in the individual life there are powers more august than abstract reason. He did not abandon his

at once: in 1808, as we have seen, he still speaks
mes with the tongue of Rousseau. But by 1818
sseau has been finally dethroned. Burke is now
oracle; the "infatuated moralist" of 1793 has
ome "the wisest of the moderns." The lesson to
ich Wordsworth had been deaf in 1793 had at
ngth been brought home to him by the logic of events
ch as Burke had foreseen: he had come to perceive
at a civil society is not a joint-stock company but a
iving organism, rooted in the past, and growing, if it
truly grows, not by the application of abstract formulæ
about the imprescriptible rights of man, but by the
laws of its own nature, which are embodied in its
institutions and discoverable only from its history.
He had neglected English history in his youth; he now
began to study it, and especially to study the history
of the most venerable of England's institutions, her
National Church. The ideal state which he con-
templated in his *Addresses to the Freeholders of West-
moreland* was something more comprehensive than a
mountain republic of shepherds and agriculturists;
it was a system in which high-born noble, knight, and
esquire would also find a place—a "mellowed feudality"
such as still held out in rural Westmoreland, a social
pyramid bound together by the "moral cement" of
personal loyalty, not by the soulless cash nexus which
alone linked employers and employed in manufacturin
towns.

Yet Wordsworth never became "completely To
fied," never quite forgot that the lowest stratum in t
social pyramid consisted not of helots but of free-b
Englishmen; and as his confidence in mankind revi
a little in his old age, so did the hope revive that
workers of England might "in God's good time"
raised by education and made fit to take a share i
government. And if "mellowed feudality" was
beyond recall, its place might be taken by a Chr
sense of brotherhood between master and man.[1]

[1] See his letter to Henry Reed in July 1844.

CHAPTER VII

RELIGION

THOSE who call Wordsworth a renegade in politics accuse him, with equal simplicity, of being an apostate in religion, his bad angel being in the one case Lord Lonsdale, in the other "my brother the Dean." It is true that the changes in Wordsworth's attitude to the Church ran more or less parallel to the changes in his political views; but religion has an inward as well as an outward aspect, and in middle life, as I shall show, Wordsworth really suffered a change of heart. If he was not a worldly-minded turncoat, neither was he all his days the consistently orthodox Anglican that some of his admirers would make him out to be. His religious development was a long, and at times a painful, process; confusion arises if we fail to distinguish its successive phases.

Wordsworth's family belonged to the Church of England, and to that party in it which came to be called High. His mother was a good Churchwoman: of his few recorded memories of her, two are connected with the church—he remembered how she once sent him to catechism with a nosegay in his breast, and another time rebuked him for complaining that they had not given him a penny at church. Her brother, with whom Dorothy lived for years, was Rector of Forncett and a Canon of Windsor.

Such were Wordsworth's home surroundings; his school was a Church of England foundation, and the Church of England still held a monopoly of the English Universities. So from childhood to manhood he grew up in an Anglican atmosphere. But there is nothing to show that he was a notably pious child; nor in his teens did he go through any of those religious crises usually attended with conviction of sin, which are

common phenomenon of adolescence. His higher emotions apparently found satisfaction at that time in a passionate love of Nature,

> "That had no need of a remoter charm,
> By thought supplied, or any interest
> Unborrowed from the eye."

It was the same at Cambridge. The Cambridge of Wordsworth's undergraduate days was a stronghold of the Evangelical Movement: two of its leaders, Isaac Milner and Charles Simon, were Cambridge dons. The Evangelical Movement was in effect an offshoot of the Methodist Revival, propagated within the Established Church itself. But neither Evangelicals nor Methodists found favour with Wordsworth, nor did he ever find favour with them. In 1850 Crabbe Robinson remarks: "The Evangelicals within and without the Church have been his despisers." Wordsworth never seems to have recognized that Methodism was one of the most powerful of the influences that saved England from revolution. On the contrary, all Dissent—and Methodism had by that time become a form of Dissent—was associated in his mind with

of his fathers without question or serious reflection, though premonitions of a deeper and more personal faith came to him at times in the solitude of his native mountains, notably on that morning at Hawkshead which left him a dedicated spirit. Now among the sublimities of the Alps came the revelation that Nature was in very truth the living and visible garment of Deity, that all the elements of the scene which he beheld were but workings of one mind,

> "Characters of the great Apocalypse . . .
> The types and symbols of Eternity,
> Of first, and last, and midst, and without end."

In the years that followed, the revelation which had dawned upon him in the Alps was overcast for a time by clouds of sexual and political passion. But before I pursue the story of Wordsworth's inner life, I must touch for a moment on his outward fortunes. When he left Cambridge in January 1791 he was faced with the duty of choosing a profession. The Army was beyond his means; the Law he disliked; there remained the Church. He decided half-heartedly to take orders, not from any sense of vocation, but seeing in the Church *the only career that seemed feasible for him*: his uncle, the Rector, would get him a curacy. He had not abandoned this idea when he went to France in November 1791. In May 1792, in the middle of his affair with Annette Vallon, we find him telling his friend Matthews that he means to take orders next winter or spring. And next February, by which time he was back in England, Dorothy is still dreaming happily of the little parsonage in which she will set up house with her brother. Within a year from that date, however, Wordsworth's opinions had undergone a change: in February 1794 he told Matthews that he could not "bow down his mind" to take orders. In after years he put it more humbly, saying that he had not felt himself good enough for the Church; but his haughty language to Matthews is true to his frame of mind at

the time. For by 1794 he had fallen under Godwin's influence, and his conventional beliefs were crumbling away. Hazlitt reports him as saying about this time to a young friend, "Throw away your books of chemistry, and read Godwin on Necessity." And Coleridge avers that when first they met, which was in September 1795, Wordsworth was "at least a *semi*-atheist." Doubts have been cast on both these statements, but without justification. It may be that neither Hazlitt nor Coleridge was in all cases a trustworthy witness; but their attitudes to Wordsworth—and to religion—were so different that when they agree on a point like this their joint testimony must be accepted. Why should it not? Godwin, though Coleridge converted him later, was a dogmatic atheist when he wrote *Political Justice*, and I find no difficulty in believing that Wordsworth was "at least a semi-atheist" while he was under Godwin's spell.

His subjection did not last long. When he came to apply the principles of *Political Justice* to concrete cases, dragging every problem of conduct to the bar of abstract reason, the monstrous futility of the calculus of consequences was revealed. Rationalism had failed him; he sank into mere scepticism and abandoned moral questions in despair. "This was the crisis of that strong disease," that miasma of despondency which had hung about him ever since he came back from France. Among the causes that brought on the disease he has recorded only those which concerned public affairs—his impotent rage against the British Government which had torn up his faith in England by the roots, and the smirching of his ideal of France by the Terror. But these causes were aggravated by personal anxieties about his own future and the fate of Annette and her child. The importance of this Annette episode has been exaggerated because it was so long concealed. Its belated discovery set would-be psychologists agog to find in it the key to the whole of Wordsworth's after-life. When they tell us that in his (curiously

numerous) poems about forsaken women he was working off his remorse for his desertion of Annette, there may be something in what they say, though "remorse" and "desertion" are not the right words; but when they go on to maintain that the early withering of his genius was the nemesis of repressed passion, they no longer deserve what Jane Austen calls "the compliment of rational opposition." If that was nemesis, it dogged the offender with a very lame foot: [illegible] zenith [illegible] the surface of Wordsworth's mind for years, [illegible] not upheave it from its depths. To speak plainly, the morality of Wordsworth's age took a less stern view of these things than either the prudery of his Victorian biographer or the inverted prudery of his Georgian critics. His passion for Annette had to contend almost from the first with his passion for the Republican cause, and his winter in Germany taught him that both these passions were dead and turned his heart back to England and his first love.

The course of Wordsworth's "strong disease" had been marked by the composition of *Guilt and Sorrow*, *The Borderers*, and the first draft of *The Ruined Cottage*. It had passed its crisis by the time he settled at Race- [illegible] hopes for France [illegible] pierre; Raisley [illegible] ncial anxieties; [illegible] warmed by his sister's love and Coleridge's admiring friendship, he gradually regained his mental tone. He recovered his sense, not of the beauty of Nature—that he had never lost—but of the life and joy in her; and as he did so his mind reverted to an earlier teacher than Godwin, one whose influence had been strong upon him when he wrote his *Descriptive Sketches*. Rousseau had taught him that, though Society had grown corrupt through man's abuse of his free-will, Nature remained good as she came from her Maker's hand: the way to find

happiness was to return to Nature, to the life of feeling and instinct. He expressed this thought seriously in the *Lines Written in Early Spring*, and half playfully in *Rob Roy's Grave*, with its praise of the creatures of flood and field which live in peace and peace of mind. The contrast of Nature and Society was not a constant thought with Wordsworth, but it left one trace upon his mind. It is false to say that he averts his ken from half of human fate; he has dealt often and unflinchingly with *human* suffering; but he does tend to avert it from the dark side of Nature, to remember the lamb and forget the tiger.

But Wordsworth could not long be content, any more than Whitman, "to live with the animals," with the life of feeling and instinct. As his mental health improved his visionary power revived; he began again to look through Nature to Nature's God, and, with the metaphysical aid of Coleridge, to see more clearly the significance of his visionary experiences. He had lost the high beatitude of youth; he could not ignore pain and evil, he who had lived through the Terror; but in moments of illumination he was aware of something far more deeply interfused in the universe than evil and pain. He had reached his full stature, and began to write those poems which have given him his unique place in the history of English poetry and English thought. I am not concerned here with the poetry of these years in its formal aspect but with the philosophy that underlies it. I use the term "philosophy" in a popular sense. Wordsworth was not a metaphysician, he was a poet; he thought not in syllogisms but in images, as he has said himself:—

> "On Man, on Nature, and on human life,
> Musing in solitude, I oft perceive
> Fair trains of imagery before me rise."

But though his thoughts clothed themselves in images they were none the less important for that. It is mere bellelettrism to extol Wordsworth's poetry and decry

his philosophy. His philosophy was the soil in which his poetry flowered.

Two very different views have been taken of the [illegible] philosophy; one, that he [illegible] identical with, [illegible] thinkers were [illegible] other, that he [illegible] moralists from Locke to Hume, Hartley, and Priestley, and in particular that he owed many of his leading ideas to the associationism of David Hartley.

I do not deny that some of Wordsworth's ideas bear a resemblance, even a striking resemblance, to some of Hegel's. But there was no direct borrowing on Wordsworth's part. He knew nothing of German metaphysics beyond what he may have heard from Coleridge, and detested what he knew. Writing to Crabbe Robinson in 1840 he thanked Heaven that he had never read a word of German metaphysics; then, remembering his correspondent's proclivities, he added civilly, "though I doubt not they are good diet for some tastes." A few months earlier he had expressed himself more frankly to Henry Reed: "German transcendentalism would be a woeful visitation for the world were it not sure to be as transitory as it is pernicious." So much for Wordsworth's debt to the Germans.

His debt to Hartley is only less fanciful. No doubt he knew *about* Hartley. He mentions him by name, though only once, as an instance of a man who was before his time, and he must have heard of him from Coleridge and Lamb. In 1796 Coleridge named his first-born after Hartley, of whom he was then a fervent admirer; and next year we find Lamb recommending Hartley's "five[1] Motives to Conduct" to Coleridge as a promising subject for a poem. But there is no evidence, external or internal, to prove that Wordsworth ever *studied* Hartley. There was no copy of Hartley's

[1] Lamb [illegible]

works in his library at Rydal Mount, nor am books that he left behind him at Racedown internal evidence amounts to no more than th in the Preface of 1800 he says that one of h objects in the *Lyrical Ballads* is to show how i associated in a state of excitement. But what is to Hartley is not the doctrine of the association o which was known to Plato and Aristotle and but his theory of the mechanism of sensati ideation as consisting of vibrations in the nerv vibratiuncles in the medullary substance of the Wordsworth knows nothing of vibrations and uncles. His whole conception of the origin and st of the human mind is fundamentally irrecon with Hartley's. To Hartley, as to Locke, the n birth is a *tabula rasa*; not so to Wordsworth:

> "Not in entire forgetfulness,
> And not in utter nakedness,
> But trailing clouds of glory do we come
> From God who is our home."

God is our home, and to Him as to our home w that is the sum of Wordsworth's theology. To I the love of God is rooted in the hope of Heav the fear of Hell. Of the love of Nature he says nc our pleasure in natural beauty derives from the se pleasures of sight, hearing, taste, smell, and tou people who have formed exalted ideas of the gc and power of the Author of Nature feel the pleasures of devotion when they view His wor very phrases show that Hartley regards God as l the same relation to Nature as a watchmaker b a watch—a conception in Wordsworth's view injurious to religious education. Then we are tc Wordsworth learned his optimism from F Wordsworth's optimism rested on his faith i soul's Divine destiny and its power to trans suffering; Hartley's on the simple reckoning tha sensible pleasures are far more numerous than sensible pains. In short, all that is most distincti

Wordsworth's thought is foreign to Hartley, and when it is fathered on Hartley his loftiest paradoxes are turned into platitudes.

What led to the discovery of this mare's nest was seemingly a remark of Coleridge's to the effect that Wordsworth "treats man as man, a subject of eye, ear, touch, and taste, in contact with all external nature," not "informing the senses from the mind" but "compounding a mind out of the senses." [1] This remark of Coleridge's contains an important half-truth. In his Kantian phase Coleridge regarded the phenomenal world as created by the human mind imposing the forms of its thought on the blind material of sensation.[2] Nature, he held, has no life of her own; she lives only in our life, and the celestial light which invests her to the glad eyes of youth comes from those eyes themselves. Wordsworth thought far otherwise. For him [illegible] ie is a manifestation, [illegible] "active principle" [illegible] mind of man. In communicating with her he communicates with it; and thus the senses, through which he communicates with Nature, feed his soul, being (in Blake's phrase) the chief inlets of soul in this age. This is why Wordsworth can say without hyperbole that Nature is the guardian of his heart and soul of all his moral being; to her he owes that purity of heart which makes him fit to see God.

How did Wordsworth conceive of the "active principle" in the years of his poetic prime? The question has sometimes been put, "Was he a pantheist or a panentheist?" The difference is vital for those who claim that, except for his brief lapse into Godwinism, Wordsworth was always an orthodox

[1] *Table-Talk*, 21st July 1832.

[2] On receiving *The Excursion*, Coleridge paid Wordsworth out for *Peter Bell* by explaining at some length how *he* would have written *The Recluse*—as a poetical exposition of Kantian transcendentalism.

Christian; for an orthodox Christian may say that Nature is in God, but not that Nature is God. We ought not to assume, however, that Wordsworth's reconversion was the work of a moment; in returning from "semi-atheism" to orthodoxy he may well have passed through a stage which could fairly be called pantheistic. It might fairly be doubted whether the author of *Tintern Abbey* conceived of the "something far more deeply interfused" as a transcendent and personal Deity. By the time he published *The Excursion* (1814) Wordsworth had grown very sensitive to the charge of "Spinosism." It was based, he said, on a passionate expression incautiously uttered in *Tintern Abbey*, which his accuser had read in coldheartedness, substituting the letter for the spirit. And he added, rather anxiously, "Unless I am mistaken, there is nothing of this kind in *The Excursion*," and went on to explain away the simile of the boy and the shell, "which has something ordinarily, but absurdly, called Spinosistic," as being dramatically appropriate in the mouth of the Wanderer when he meets the sceptic on his own ground.

A more answerable question is raised when we ask what was Wordsworth's attitude to Christianity at this time. In 1798 Coleridge said of him, "He loves and reverences Christ and Christianity; I wish he did more"; and under 24th October 1803, *Anima Poetæ* records a conversation in which Wordsworth and Hazlitt "spoke so irreverently and malignantly of the Divine Wisdom that it overset me." Coleridge's evidence may be suspect or ambiguous, but there is the evidence of the poems themselves. Pantheistic or panentheistic, the poems of this period, from *Tintern Abbey* to the *Immortality* Ode, contain nothing that is definitely Christian. It is not that they never refer to the central mysteries of the Christian faith—the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Resurrection—but that the whole way of salvation which they imply has no place for these mysteries. It is through Nature alo

that the poet communicates with the "active principle" of the Universe; she is the soul of *all* his moral being. The natural mystic needs no Redeemer; his soul mounts Heavenwards by its own impulse and its own efforts. This may be Platonism, but it is not Christianity. Late in life, commenting on two sonnets which he had translated from Michael Angelo, he observed that the second of them was evidently written in Angelo's advanced years, "when it was natural that the Platonism that pervades the one should give way to the Christian feeling that inspires the other." "It was natural"; he spoke from his own experience.

Between 1798 and 1802 Wordsworth made four attempts to give an account of the visionary experiences on which his mystical faith was based, namely in *Tintern Abbey* (1798), in *The Pedlar* (1798-1802), in *The Simplon Pass* (1799), and in a piece of blank verse which he wrote between 1798 and 1800 and probably meant at first to include in *The Prelude*, though he did not finally do so. The first three passages are so familiar that we are in danger of thinking that we understand them because we know them by heart. I shall therefore quote the last, and quote it in full, as being at once the boldest and the least hackneyed statement of Wordsworth's mystical creed :—

"I seemed to learn . . .
That what we see of forms and images
Which float along our minds, and what we feel
Of active or recognizable thought,
Prospectiveness, or intellect, or will,
Not only is not worthy to be deemed
Our being, to be prized as what we are,
But is the very littleness of life.
Such consciousness I deem but accidents,
Relapses from the one interior life
That lives in all things, sacred from the touch
Of that false secondary power by which
In weakness we create distinctions, then
Believe that all our puny boundaries are thin
Which we perceive and not which we have n[illegible]
—In which all beings live with God, them[illegible]

Are God, existing in the mighty whole,
As indistinguishable as the cloudless East
At noon is from the cloudless West, when all
The hemisphere is one cerulean blue."

"Themselves are God": is this pantheism or panentheism? In the hour of ecstasy the mystic does not ask himself such questions, or any questions. His whole being is an awareness of God, a union or communion in which thought expires in blessedness and love.

But when the high hour of ecstasy is past, the mind begins to think again, and seeks to render itself an account of its experience. When Wordsworth came to incorporate *The Simplon Pass* in the Sixth Book of *The Prelude*, he prefaced it with a passage which sums the conclusions of his reflective thought in this, the mystical phase of his spiritual life. When he learned that they had crossed the Alps, "Imagination," he says,

"rose from the mind's abyss.
. . . . I was lost;
Halted without an effort to break through;
But to my conscious soul I now can say—
"I recognize thy glory;" in such strength
Of usurpation, when the light of sense
Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed
The invisible world, doth greatness make abode,
There harbours; whether we be young or old,
Our destiny, our being's heart and home
Is with infinitude, and only there."

The operative words are "now" and "thy." The immediate effect of the tidings was trance; but now, looking back on that visionary experience, and reading it with other such experiences, he perceives its glorious significance for himself. The soul that can see the Divine in Nature must itself be Divine. It belongs to a world beyond the finite world of sense, and its true life is a ceaseless pressing on towards that infinite life which is its essence and its end. Thus Wordsworth freed himself completely from that external and mechanical conception of the relation of God to Man and Nature which had prevailed throughout the

eighteenth century, as if God had withdrawn into his Heaven, having "made" Nature once for all, to supply man's bodily needs, not to speak peace to his soul. Among his precursors, Cowper came nearest to Wordsworth in this, and might have come still nearer but that, believing himself damned, he could not find in his own breast the God of whom he had glimpses in Nature. To Wordsworth the God in Man and in Nature is one.

"The owl of Pallas does not fly," says Hegel, "till dusk has fallen." It was when his private illumination had faded away that Wordsworth set himself to philosophize upon it in the *Immortality* Ode. The soul, he tells us, comes from afar, and the light of its heavenly home lingers on it in its innocent childhood; but the embodied soul must assume its earthly burden and take its place in the world of men, and, as the auroral light of its home dies away, must learn to live by duty not by instinct. But though the heavenly light has gone, the memory of it remains to remind the soul of its Divine origin and destiny. The pre-existence of the soul is assumed throughout. In his timid old age Wordsworth was alarmed to learn that this assumption had proved a rock of offence to pious readers who found no warrant for it in the Bible, and he made haste to explain it away. The structure of the poem, he said, rested partly on two of his own experiences in childhood—the dreamlike splendour which invested objects of sight, and the difficulty of admitting the notion of death as applicable to his own being. Having to wield some of the elements of his experience when he was impelled to write the Ode, "I took hold," he says, "of the notion of pre-existence as having sufficient foundation in humanity for authorising me to make for my purpose the best use I could of it as a Poet." So

"The soul that rises with us, our life's star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,"

is mere poetry? I cannot believe it. If these words do not mean pre-existence they mean nothing. It is

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easier to believe that Wordsworth at seventy-three had forgotten what he meant when he wrote the Ode at thirty-five. Doubtless even when he wrote it he had no definite notion of the nature of the soul's pre-natal state. The child's recollections of it are "shadowy." But however shadowy they may be, they

> "Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,
> Are yet a master-light of all our seeing."

In the Platonic notion of pre-existence he found a conception that unified the recollections of his childhood with the visionary experiences of his youth, assigning to the soul a Divine origin that accorded with its Divine destiny.

The first four stanzas of the *Immortality* Ode were written in 1802. By that time Wordsworth's visionary power had departed, never to return except for a moment in 1818, "upon an Evening of Extraordinary Splendour and Beauty." As his private illumination faded he began to feel the need of that support to the spiritual life which comes when two or three are gathered together and faith is buttressed with institution. At this point an event occurred which precipitated the impending change. In February 1805 his brother John, captain of the East Indiaman "Abergavenny," went down with his ship. John was the dearest of all his brothers, and his sudden death was the first great personal calamity that had befallen Wordsworth since his father died twenty-two years before—and that loss he had been too young to feel deeply for long. He had seen death and suffering in France; he had known anger and shame and disillusionment in the years that followed his return to England; but these, so to speak, had been public griefs, and for them he had found a sufficient consolation in his mystical communion with Nature and, through her, with the Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe. But now God had put forth His hand and touched his bone and his flesh. In his deep distress he turned, as others in like case have turned, to the

consolations of revealed religion, with its promise of personal immortality and its assurance of Christian fellowship. The need for fellowship finds expression in the *Stanzas Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle.* From boyhood he had felt, perhaps too much, "the self-sufficing power of solitude"; but now distress has humanized his soul, and he cries,

> "Farewell, farewell, the heart that lives alone,
> Housed in a dream, at distance from the Kind!"

(In his self-reproach he speaks of his solitary musings as dreams.) His letter of 12th March to Sir George

agents? Why have we sympathies that make the best of us so afraid of inflicting pain and sorrow, which yet we see dealt about so lavishly by the supreme governor? Why should our notions of right towards each other, and to all sentient beings within our influence, differ so widely from what appears to be His notion and rule, if everything were to end here? Would it not be blasphemy to say that, upon the supposition of the thinking principle being destroyed by death, however inferior we may be to the great Cause and Ruler of all things, we have *more of love* in our nature than He has? The thought is monstrous; and yet how to get rid of it, except upon the supposition of *another* and a *better* world, I do not see."

Far-off echoes of Wordsworth's meditations on pain and sorrow in these years may be heard in *The White Doe of Rylstone*, the story of a soul "enskied and sainted" by suffering, upheld by memory and reason, and companioned in its desolation by the innocence of Nature, symbolized in the magical figure of the white doe—a strange poem, perhaps the most finely conceived of all Wordsworth's longer poems, and the most difficult, moving as it does in an air almost too rarefied for human breathing.

In *The Excursion* we can follow the itinerary of Wordsworth's spiritual journey from "semi-atheism" to orthodoxy. The composition of *The Excursion* extended over many years. The original *Ruined Cottage*, which is the nucleus of it all, belongs to Racedown days: indeed, the scene of it is laid in Dorset. *The Pedlar*, in which it was wrapped up, was first written at Alfoxden in 1798, but was still being altered and "arranged" in 1802. In 1804, with *The Prelude* half written, Wordsworth tried to resume his great philosophical poem, *The Recluse*; but repeated appeals failed to extract from Coleridge the notes which he had promised for that *magnum opus*, and when at last he did set them down in Malta, the bearer of his letter caught the plague, and all his papers were burned, Coleridge's ideas among them. Deprived of Coleridge's metaphysical aid for his high argument Wordsworth, about 1809, attacked his task from another quarter: he turned back not to the fragmentary *Recluse* but to *The Pedlar*, and decided to continue it and make of it the nave of that Gothic Church of which the unpublished *Prelude* was some day to be the ante-chapel.

Prospectively, then, *The Excursion* was an instalment of *The Recluse*; in another sense, and that the sense which most concerns us here, it simply resumed and continued *The Prelude*. Wordsworth's own mind was still the main haunt and region of his song, though he disguised its autobiographical significance by introducing three interlocutors besides himself—the Wanderer, the Solitary, and the Pastor. The Wanderer is obviously an idealized Wordsworth, Wordsworth as he might have been if he had been born on a Highland croft [1] and never gone to France. The story of his education resumes and idealizes the substance of Books I and II of *The Prelude*; his arguments against despondency restate in more abstract form the substance of Books XI and XII. The figure of the Solitary is not a self-

[1] In the 1798 version the Pedlar (*i.e.* the Wanderer) is a Cumbrian.

portrait in the same sense, being in fact a composite picture with its main features taken from the Rev. Joseph Fawcett; but it represents the eclipse of faith through which, or the penumbra of which, Wordsworth had passed when he came back from France; while the Pastor, who is much more slightly sketched, stands for the orthodox position to which Wordsworth was [illegible]

brother's death, the most important character in the poem is the Wanderer, and the most important thing about him is his relation to the Pastor. Educated by Nature, like Wordsworth, he becomes a fit mouthpiece for the natural mysticism, now grown more definitely theistic, of the poet of *Tintern Abbey*, the original *Prelude*, and the *Immortality* Ode. He had been reared in the strict discipline of the Scottish Church, as Wordsworth in that of the English; but a long and happy life spent in communion with Nature and acts of kindness to men had sublimed away all that was harsh and forbidding in his early creed, and left an undogmatic faith in God, such as a gentle dreamer, a natural mystic, might evolve from the promptings of his own pure heart. And so he stands for Natural Religion—say rather, the Religion of Nature. When he refers, as he seldom does, to Revelation, his language is sometimes curiously ambiguous, as if he thought that the Garden of Eden and the Fall of Man *might* be not historical facts but symbols of the heaven that lies about us in our infancy and is lost as we grow older. It is with arguments drawn from the Religion of Nature that he refutes the despondent scepticism of the

significant is the fact that there is no collision in argument between him and the Pastor, who treats him, as do the other characters, with a deference that is almost reverential. The Religion of Nature is not repudiated, but melts, as it were, into the fuller day of Revelation. Wordsworth had returned to orthodoxy. Like others who have come by the mystic way, he found anchorage for his faith in the Gospel of St John. Yet misgivings remained. It was long before he attained, if he ever did attain, the sober certainty of faith which his wife enjoyed.

For Wordsworth, to return to orthodoxy meant to return to the Church of England. It was the Church of his family and of the Tory party into which circumstances had drawn or driven him in the course of the Napoleonic Wars. He had another and a less personal reason. He had proclaimed that

> " by the soul
> Only, the nations shall be great and free."

His study of English History, including that study of Church History which afterwards yielded the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, convinced him that the Church of England was the appointed guardian of England's soul, and his own observation had taught him that in many parts of the country only the clergy of the Established Church stood between the people and barbarism.

Having returned to the Anglican Church, Wordsworth accepted most of her dogmas with no such reservations as the Wanderer might have made, except that for long he could not bring himself to swallow the comminatory clauses of the Athanasian Creed. As the years went on he identified himself more and more closely with the interests of the Church, temporal as well as spiritual: he would shed his blood for her; he would rather die a thousand deaths than see the Church in Ireland dispossessed. These passionate expressions of loyalty command our respect more readily than the obscurantism which saw in the cholera

epidemic God's judgment on the Reform Bill, or the bigotry which opposed so plain a piece of justice as the Dissenters' Chapels Bill. His dislike of Dissenters was partly, of Roman Catholics largely, political. Apart from politics he found much to admire in Roman Catholicism, though he had a horror of Popery and priestcraft. He sympathized with the Tractarian movement in its reverence for antiquity, but feared its papistical tendencies; if these prevailed he prophesied a civil war—which would start in Scotland.

These things belong to what Aubrey de Vere called his prose mind, and need not be dwelt on. Unfortunately his narrowing orthodoxy infected his poetic mind as well. When he revised *The Prelude* in or about 1840 he laboured, as Professor de Selincourt has shown, to excise or qualify every expression that might be thought to smack of "Spinosism." A single instance may suffice to show the general trend of this recension: in 1805 he had spoken of books as Powers

> "For ever to be hallowed; only less,
> For what we may become, and what we need,
> Than Nature's self, which is the breath of God;"

in 1840 he added the line—

> "Or His pure Word by miracle revealed."

But ne[illegible] *The Prelude* is so [illegible] ose that he made [illegible] *The Ruined Cottage*, out of which that book grew, and which can still be detached from it without leaving a scar, told the story of Margaret, a poor woman whose husband had been driven by unemployment to enlist, and who waits for his return year after year, half-crazed with grief and hope deferred, and sinking deeper and deeper into poverty and misery, till cottage and garden go to ruin:

> "Yet still
> She loved this wretched spot, nor would for worlds
> Have parted hence; and still that length of road,

> And this rude bench, one torturing hope endeared,
> Fast rooted at her heart: and here, my Friend,
> In sickness she remained; and here she died,
> Last human tenant of these ruined walls."

So at first the story ended, an unrelieved, heart-breaking tragedy, an aftermath of the mood that had produced *Guilt and Sorrow.* But when he put it into the Pedlar's mouth, in which form it appears in Book I of *The Excursion*, he used his narrator's mystical piety to blunt the sharp edge of the tragedy and moss its harsh outlines over with quietist reflections on the healing power of Nature and the transience of human life and suffering:

> " I well remember that those very plumes,
> Those weeds, and the high spear-grass on that wall,
> By mist and silent rain-drops silvered o'er,
> As once I passed, did to my heart convey
> So still an image of tranquillity,
> So calm and still, and looked so beautiful
> Amid the uneasy thoughts which filled my mind,
> That what we feel of sorrow and despair
> From ruin and from change, and all the grief
> The passing shows of being leave behind,
> Appeared an idle dream that could not live
> Where meditation was."

So the lines stood in 1814. But when he revised the poem for the final edition of 1845 he changed the last clause to

> " that could maintain,
> Nowhere, dominion o'er the enlightened spirit
> Whose meditative sympathies repose
> Upon the breast of Faith."

Not content with this, he went back on the Pedlar's speech, and inserted these lines:—

> " Nor more would she have asked as due to One
> Who, in her worst distress, had ofttimes felt
> The unbounded might of prayer; and learned, with soul
> Fixed on the Cross, that consolation springs
> From sources deeper far than deepest pain
> For the meek Sufferer"—

lines utterly untrue to the impression which the story of Margaret leaves on our minds, and quite irreconcilable with the language in which he has just described her as living

> "Through the whole winter, reckless and alone."

These three versions, read in succession, tell the whole story of Wordsworth's long pilgrimage.